

Death And Inscriptions
With Respect To *David Copperfield*,
***Great Expectations*, And**
Charles Dickens

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the presence and effect of nineteenth-century aspects of death in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* as the two of Dickens' novels that best illustrate and utilise the relationship between fact and fancy, memory and imagination, that the creation of fiction shares with the memorialising process. They offer various examples of the need for an appropriate intermingling of imagination and reality in the preservation of memory, whether for or of oneself. Because they are first-person narratives that contain significant autobiographical materials, these novels bear upon our understanding of Dickens' own wish to be remembered and memorialised through his fiction.

Chapter 1 discusses aspects of death in the nineteenth century such as the funeral, undertakers, mourning dress, the site of interment and ideal commemorative methods. Dickens' participation in the public debate over appropriate funerary and memorialising customs is discussed by reference to articles in his two journals, and an example of his response to personal bereavement is given by reference to Mary Hogarth's death. The similarities between epitaphs and fiction are noted in discussing the memorialising/epitaphic function of literature.

Chapter 2, which discusses *David Copperfield*, analyses David's experiences of death and his instruction in modes of mourning and memorialising. David's memorial of self intimates the consequences of an extremely edited memory in the memorialising process.

Chapter 3 examines *Great Expectations*, analysing the presence and effect of aspects of death, particularly epitaphs, as registers of Pip's development. Pip's memorial

demonstrates the importance of admitting memory in its entirety before successful memorialising can occur, and the implications of this for one's life.

Chapter 4 applies to Dickens the terms established in the thesis and examines his relationship with the two novels. The connection between fiction and epitaphs is discussed with regard to the instructions in Dickens' will and the conclusion reached that Dickens' works of fiction are offered as the extended epitaph he has inscribed for the ideal commemoration of his memory.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about some aspects of death in Dickens, such as the child's death, the sentimental death, the death-bed scene, Dickens' religious beliefs, and perceptions of heaven and the afterlife, but little has been written about the material aspects of death in the Victorian era as represented in Dickens' works. The presence of these material aspects of death in Dickens' writing not only indicates social and cultural concerns of the nineteenth century, but also functions as a key to the personal and moral presentation and development of his characters. This thesis explores the presence and effect of death in the novels of Charles Dickens', with particular attention to *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the two novels which complement each other on so many levels and which are most richly laden with the material aspects of death and allusions to death. It is possible to interpret the presence of these material aspects of death in these two texts in particular as illustrating the tension between the personal and the public self that may be seen as developing throughout the century, involving issues of identity, moral growth and class. As the experience of death is appropriated by the developing capitalist society, becoming a public business event as much as a personal experience of loss, death becomes a compelling event by which the relationship between private respect (for the dead, for others, for oneself) and public respectability is illuminated.

This relationship is identifiable throughout Dickens' works but is most evident in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the only novels that Dickens wrote entirely as first-person narratives, as fictional memoirs, and which also resonate with the autobiographical experience of their shared creator. Of all Dickens' works, these two

particularly show death functioning as an instructive force for personal and public modes of living by raising issues of memory, acceptance, forgiveness and memorialising. The degree to which characters are able to accept death, often linked with betrayal, affects their ability to forgive and thus to live comfortably with themselves. Consequently, the relationship between modes of remembering, such as tombstones, books and inscriptions, involves degrees of creative interpretation and creative censorship that raise issues of self. The endeavour to shape memory and commemorate a life is as relevant to the production of fiction as to remembering the dead, and the idea that one “lives” in the memory, monument, inscription or relic that survives thus invites an exploration of the extent to which David and Pip self-memorialise. The conclusions drawn from this textual analysis will be extrapolated to Dickens himself, incorporating the relationship between fiction and memory that is present in all his works, but is particularly a creative impulse in these two. *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* mark a fusion of writing a life with memorialising the dead that has implications for the extent to which it is possible to see these novels together as Dickens’ pre-emptive, inscriptive attempt at self-commemoration.

The imaginative creation and censorship of memory that occurs in the memorialising process bears more than a superficial resemblance to the creation of fiction. Memorialising and the creation of fiction are united by inscription, the material aspect of death and fiction which both commemorates and shapes memory. Moreover, the process of inscription, whether on a tombstone erected on a freehold plot or in a book, represents the attempt to construct a sense of self that will likewise continue in perpetuity. This dual aspect of inscription enables the designation of Dickens as both writer-of-

fiction and writer-of-epitaphs, a conjoining of roles illustrated by Mary Hogarth's death whereby the inscription of her in fiction originates in the inscription on her tombstone (see 31-34).

The introductory discussion of material aspects of death in the nineteenth-century and of Dickens' participation in the debate surrounding them reveals two related yet distinct elements: the primarily functional character of the material aspects of death, particularly the funeral, the interment, and mourning dress; and the memorialising element which is encouraged and sustained by the site of interment and the material aspects of death that primarily fulfil a commemorative function: the monument and the epitaph. The commemorative, memorialising process generally depends on the completion of the more functional aspects of death which may be said to be more proximate to the actual, physical death. It is these two related aspects of death that this thesis explores: the material aspects of death in Dickens' novels function as material aspects of fiction, important for plot, imagery, character development, serving as moral indices, while the memorialising aspect, the balance of memory and mourning, the creation of a commemorative object, and the shaping of memory via the act of truthful yet imaginative inscription, has implications for the composition and interpretation of any literary work, but is especially appropriate for first-person narratives in the memoir (memorial) form, and particularly when such texts contain autobiographical elements of the primary author (inscriber).

CHAPTER 1: DICKENS AND DEATH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Modern scholars agree that attitudes to death are indicators of social change (Whaley 12), and that the nineteenth century saw marked differences in the experience of death: “Major changes in the conduct and form of funerals, not least the introduction of cremations, point to profound cultural and religious shifts in Victorian and Edwardian society” (Jalland, *Victorian Family* 193). Death was an issue that affected many parts of society, from the economic and public sphere to the personal sphere of morality and identity. Death and attitudes to it were topics that excited much debate during the nineteenth century. Not only did Dickens participate in this debate, but death also plays a major part in his novels: it is often used to make a moral statement about a character and is also important for the delineation of character and the development of a stable identity. That death had a very real presence for the Victorians is demonstrated by the material aspects of death that were the outward and visible signs of this: funeral practices, burial grounds, mourning customs, the language associated with death, and memorialising techniques. These constitute the material aspects of death for the purpose of this thesis and form the socio-historical context for the textual interpretation.

There has been some scholarly debate as to the therapeutic value of the nineteenth-century’s material aspects of death. In 1982 David Cannadine identified and disputed the assumption that the century “had been a golden age of grief, in which the carefully structured and universally observed rituals of mourning provided necessary and successful support to those who were bereaved and in need of restructuring their lives” (188). Cannadine suggests “that the conventional picture of death in the nineteenth

century is excessively romanticized and insufficiently nuanced; that it makes assumptions about the financial and therapeutic values of the elaborate death-bed, funerary and mourning rituals which are unproven; and that it ignores significant developments [. . .] at the end of the century” (188-89). Among those who entered the ensuing debate was Pat Jalland whose study of experiences of death in middle- and upper-class families concluded that “most nineteenth-century mourning rituals helped to meet the psychological needs of the bereaved” (*Victorian Family* 12). This debate, though interesting, is beyond the purview of this thesis as are other areas of “Dickens and death” which have been extensively discussed, such as the sentimental death, child deaths, the death-bed scene, Dickens’ religious beliefs, and perceptions of heaven and the afterlife.¹ This thesis is more concerned with the presence and effect of these topics as material aspects of death in Dickens’ texts than with debating their merits.

Social and Historical Context

The Times, 2 February 1875, observed that “[i]t is within the last half century that prodigious funerals, awful hearses drawn by preternatural quadrupeds, clouds of black plumes, solid and magnificent oak coffins instead of the sepulchral elm, coffin within coffin, lead, brick graves, and capacious catacombs have spread downwards far beyond the select circle once privileged to illustrate the vanity of human greatness” (qtd. in

¹ For some discussions of Dickens and death see Kaplan, Fred. *Sacred Tears: Sentimentality in Victorian Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987; Lerner, Laurence. *Angels and Absences: Child Deaths in the Nineteenth Century*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1997; Sanders, A. *Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist*, and Wheeler, Michael. *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Morley 11). Behind this image lies an extensive social and historical framework which contributed to the striking visual display of a Victorian funeral.

The type of funeral commonly known as “Victorian” was the product of funeral rites that had their origins in the sixteenth century and which underwent various permutations in the intervening centuries. The College of Arms, which was part of the Royal Household, in the sixteenth century set and maintained a very ordered system of funeral etiquette by which the type of funeral a person received showed, in every detail, the exact social rank that the deceased had held in life. The highly schematised system used for funerals of the nobility was the system adopted and adhered to throughout the seventeenth century by the emerging funeral furnishing trade which applied the sliding scale of noble rank to the class gradations of the general populace. Well established by the eighteenth century, the “trade,” as funeral furnishing had become known, provided “funerals for all classes of society and at various costs, dependent on the social status of the deceased” (Litten 99).² Litten observes that the “inflated snobbery of purchasing a ritual traditionally reserved for those of a higher social rank did not appear until the very end of the eighteenth century” (14).

By the nineteenth century dying was very much something from which to make a living: the business of death became a capitalist enterprise. The historical and religious framework that had shaped the Victorian funeral was obscured and there was widespread ignorance as to its origins, as an 1843 report into urban burial practices revealed.³

² Undertaking was predominantly an urban phenomenon until the 1860s and 1870s, with a contrast often drawn between “the extravagance of urban funerals and the simplicity of rural interments” (May 6-7).

³ See Chadwick’s exchange with a London undertaker in *On the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns* 49.

Divorced from these origins, in the nineteenth century funerals acquired other meanings: they became a powerful mode of demonstrating social position and economic independence, if not affluence. Eventually, paying last respects to the dead translated as a demonstration of that all-important Victorian quality, respectability, and as we shall see later this was of particular concern to Dickens. Funerals were a public expression of the mourners' emotional state but they were also a potent indicator of the social status of the deceased and the bereaved. One scholar has described the Victorian funeral as "the rite of passage *par excellence* by which to assert financial and social position – a secular last judgement which had as its goal the exhibition of worldly respectability" (Richardson, *Dissection* 272). In a society where conspicuous consumption and display played a prominent role, funerals enabled the maximum public display of a family's wealth and position (Curl 20). As Richardson states, the "Victorian era was one with an obsessive interest in the gradations of social placing; and death served as a prime means of expressing, and of defining, social place" ("Why was Death so Big" 106).

Richardson's study of the 1832 Anatomy Act connects the rise of the undertaker with the emergence of grave-robbing for dissection purposes:

The desire for security in the grave went hand in hand with the growth in the commercial provision of funerary services. During the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the same period in which bodysnatching became a separate profession, undertakers had begun to set up shop in urban areas and to purvey their services in the creation of funerals to suit the pockets and aspirations of the growing middle classes. In their hands, the funeral came to possess flexible potential in the

assertion of social status: various levels of expenditure would purchase equally various permutations of coffin strength and durability, grave or vault size, security, commemoration, and funerary display. (“Why was Death so Big” 111)

Richardson argues persuasively that with the passing of the Anatomy Act, by which the bodies of those who died a pauper were made available for dissection, the threat of body-snatching receded and the respectable funeral, with its expenditure and display, became an end in itself: “Respectable funerary display was a powerful social statement, an articulation of social aspiration and attainment, a celebration of the financial ability to honour the dead in an acceptable way” (“Why was Death so Big” 115).

Funerals were graded according to cost and the respectability that they conveyed corresponded with the financial outlay.⁴ Subsequently, the undertaking business, otherwise known as the “dismal trade,” acquired a great deal of power, the style of funeral generally being left to the undertaker’s discretion. He would be instructed simply to provide what was “customary and proper” and the family would find themselves “committed to all the trimmings thought necessary to [the deceased’s] rank” (Morley 24). Although a powerful figure, the undertaker was, generally speaking, neither popular nor respectable. As the nineteenth century progressed, the desire for a “decent,” “respectable” funeral spread from the middle classes to the lower strata of society. Much money was spent by those for whom dying on the parish and receiving a pauper’s funeral was an indignity to be avoided at all costs. Richardson observes that a respectable funeral

⁴ Examples of funeral costs are given by Litten in “Appendix 1,” and Chadwick records undertakers’ evidence on the funeral expenses and modes of conducting the funerals of different classes of society (46-55).

demonstrated wealth “and – in stark contrast to the pauper’s funeral – distance from the workhouse” (*Death* 273).

A pauper’s funeral meant a flimsy coffin at best and a mean, anonymous burial in a mass grave. As the urban population increased so did mortality rates and the existing churchyards in cities like London could not cope with this pressure on their already depleted resources. Mass graves were overfilled and recently interred bodies frequently exhumed, often a matter of merely scraping away the top layer of soil, to make room for new bodies.⁵ Mass graves were more easily accessible to the resurrection men who would disinter a new corpse and sell the body to meet the increasing demand for anatomical dissection subjects. That dissection was the fate of the poor received legislative sanction with the passing of the Anatomy Act in 1832. Thus, to die a pauper not only proclaimed that one had failed to achieve a respectable position in life: it brought the denial of the expected and customary respects of death, one of which was the religious hope of bodily resurrection. The desire to avoid a pauper’s death is portrayed by Dickens in the character of Betty Higden in *Our Mutual Friend*. Sewn into her gown is money for her burial which, if she were discovered in her flight from Poor Law intervention, “[W]ould be taken from her as a pauper with no right to it, and she would be carried to the accursed workhouse” (504). Betty escapes a pauper’s funeral: her burial place is obscure and anonymous, but respectable nonetheless. Betty is emblematic of an entire class that made financial sacrifices while alive in order to have a decent death.

⁵ Just such a burial ground is one of the abuses that Dickens rails against in *Bleak House*. Jo leads Lady Dedlock to the “scene of horror” (278; ch. 16) that is her former lover’s burial place and his account of the interment is gruesomely grounded in fact: “Over yinder. Among them piles of bones, and close to that there kitchen winder! They put him in wery nigh the top. They was obliged to stamp upon it to git it in. I could inkiver it with my broom, if the gate was open. [...] Look at the rat!” (278; ch. 16).

Contemporary commentators became increasingly critical of the ostentation of funerals, of the influence exerted by the undertaking trade, of its blatant profiteering systems, and of the burden that aspirations to respectability imposed on the lower classes of society, frequently at the expense of vital necessities. The 1843 Report into urban interment estimated that £4 to £5 million was “annually thrown into the grave, at the expense of the living” (qtd. in Curl 23) and denounced “the present accumulation of ceremony and outlay at funerals as not only ridiculous but sinful” (qtd. in Curl 24). Funeral practices were incorporated into the wider issue of public sanitation as discussed in the 1843 report commissioned by the Home Secretary, *On the Results of a Special Inquiry into the Practice of Interment in Towns*.⁶ The report’s primary concern was an examination of that which most strikingly captured the Victorian concern with mortality: the disposal of the dead. As early as the 1660s London’s churchyards had been noted by contemporaries as being overfull, inadequate and “an affront to public decency” (C. Brooks 3). In the nineteenth century London and other large provincial towns encountered a burial crisis of mammoth proportions as a result of the demographic changes that saw dramatic urbanisation from which mortality and sanitation emerged as social issues of paramount importance. There was also resentment over the Church’s monopoly of burial rituals and the receipt of burial fees.

The urban burial reform movement gathered force and the 1820s saw the emergence of a campaign dedicated to the provision of more cemeteries for London. Obstacles to reform included the difficulty and high cost of purchasing property in London and the intricate and entrenched financial interests enjoyed by the existing parish

⁶ The 1843 Report, compiled by Edwin Chadwick, was a supplementary report to the 1842 *Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Classes of Great Britain*, also by Chadwick.

churchyards. Eventually, a private cemetery was developed and operated by the incorporated General Cemetery Company. This was the Kensal Green Cemetery, opened in 1837 and the first speculative venture to deal in death on purely commercial terms. Although responding to the urban burial crisis, Kensal Green and the other privately-owned cemeteries throughout the 1820s and 1830s did nothing to alleviate the pressure on the urban cemeteries which were the only option available to the urban poor who could not afford the private cemeteries' prices. A noted exception was the strongly non-conformist Abney Park which aimed to provide a cemetery for all denominations and all classes. Brooks observes that "[w]ithin its limits, Abney Park was successful in attracting labouring-class burials, which took place in common graves between the perimeter paths and the boundary walls – all decent enough, even if firmly demarcated from the bodies of the better off" (*Mortal Remains* 28). Some joint stock companies even derived financial returns by exploiting the needs and desires of the working class for decent burial, establishing cemeteries that continued the intramural practice of filling common graves as densely as possible. However, the middle class remained the primary target market of the private cemeteries and "their buildings, their planting and planning [were] designed to accommodate and express middle-class attitudes towards death and commemoration" (C. Brooks 28). The expense of maintaining such attitudes effectively meant that "the joint stock cemeteries, particularly in London but also in the great provincial towns, allowed the bourgeoisie to buy an alternative to a place in the burying grounds" (C. Brooks 31).

Unease was increasingly expressed at the commercial objectives of the private cemeteries which were no guarantee of improved sanitation. In addition to Chadwick, George Alfred Walker expressed such a concern in his explicit denial of a connection

with private cemeteries in his 1839 publication, *Gatherings from Graveyards*. In this detailed examination of the state of London's intramural cemeteries, Walker sought to present the burial crisis to a middle-class readership and, by describing in great detail the insanitary conditions of the churchyards, to gain support for legislative intervention. Essentially, Walker's argument was that "the vilely insanitary conditions inflicted upon the urban proletariat, living and dead, 'to which their poverty and not their will consents', involved everybody. And if the prosperous and complacent ignored the crisis, it would involve them whether they wished it or not" (C. Brooks 31).⁷

Legislative intervention was initially hesitant and hedged by constraints that hindered genuine reform.⁸ But the various Acts between 1817 and 1857 (the Cemeteries Clauses Act 1817, the Public Health Act 1848, the Metropolitan Interments Act 1850, the Metropolitan Burial Act 1852, and various amending Acts from 1853-57) did eventually succeed in achieving a workable solution to the burial crisis by providing cheap and decent interment for the urban poor; still, "[B]y their very nature, the Burial Acts ensured that the provision and regulation of public cemeteries would rest in middle-class hands" (C. Brooks 49).⁹ Dickens' response to the Acts is illustrated by Lewis' poem "City Graves" in *Household Words* 14 December 1850. This poem recalls the indignities done to the dead and the living and laments that legislative action, though welcome, is too late

⁷ The interconnectedness of society is a recurring theme in Dickens and has dramatic effects in *Bleak House* in particular, where sanitation reform and the burial crisis are united in the description of Nemo's burial in a "hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed," surrounded by houses "with every villainy of life in action close on death, and every poisonous element of death in action close on life" (202; ch. 11).

⁸ Chris Brooks' *Mortal Remains* contains an informative account of the reform movement and legislative intervention.

⁹ "The retention of authority at a local level, the devolution of funding, denominational equality, were all matters of middle-class concern [. . .]. The availability of vaults and burial plots in perpetuity, so significant a factor in the attraction of private enterprise cemeteries for the middling sort, was also an important feature of the Burial Board cemeteries" (C. Brooks 49).

for many people: “No Schedule shall restore to health, / No Act give life again / To the thousands whom, in bygone years, / Our City Graves have slain!” (277). Such legislation also informs Dickens’s presentation of the topic in *Bleak House* (see also footnotes 5 and 7).

The public cemeteries were shaped by the same social and imaginative influences by which the private cemeteries had appealed to middle-class sensibilities. Away from the city, in their situation and their landscape, the private cemeteries had gone far in creating the ideal environment for evoking and commemorating the dead. Their location and the impression of security offered by boundary walls and wardens made them less susceptible to the threat of disturbance. The policy of non-intervention adopted by first the private companies and then the public management as to types of monuments erected enabled freedom of memorialising expression, and “the availability of burial plots in perpetuity offered a permanent stake in a development that consciously expressed a cognate gentility” (C. Brooks 11). Middle-class sensibilities were accommodated by the opportunity presented for the affectionate family and its public status to be jointly commemorated: “Property became within the reach of all enterprising men, and the family grave, like the family house, became a mark of substance. The family, united in life, was to remain so even in death” (Curl 25).

The private cemeteries of the early nineteenth century represent the paradox that although death was the great leveller of class, it was also the experience by which class distinctions were enforced and preserved. Kensal Green’s monuments have been described as

one of the keys to understanding [its] appeal to the nineteenth century. In a rapidly changing society, the prizes of individualism also brought the penalties of unstable rank and uncertain status. [. . .] but a memorial in Kensal Green, particularly a substantial one, was also a badge of belonging, an expression of middle-class membership – made more so by the fact that membership was expensive. (C. Brooks 12-13)

The development of private cemeteries reflects the process by which the middle-class sought to define and position itself in society, first by distinguishing itself from the aristocracy and then by marginalising the working class. The relationship between the aristocracy and the middle-class eventually became a tacit alliance of convenience indicating the ambivalent nature of middle-class attitudes to the aristocracy as it sought to establish meritocracy as the basis for social status and respectability: “From the elitism of birth the notion changed to the elitism of individual worth: God would reward the deserving, not the well-born” (Morris 6).

The private cemeteries reflected this alliance of aristocratic convenience and middle-class consolidation with the middling-sort patrons of Kensal Green able to enjoy the company of the Duke of Sussex from 1843 and of Princess Sophia, daughter of George III, from 1848. A visitors’ handbook for Kensal Green published in 1843 “could boast that it contained ‘members of more than two hundred of the first families in the kingdom’” (C. Brooks 13). This statement reveals the class tensions that were perpetuated beyond the grave: although death was putatively the great leveller, the prospect of sharing one’s final resting place with those of a higher social position was part of the appeal that the private cemeteries exerted on the middle classes. Brooks notes

that the burial of the two members of the royal family there in the 1840s “made the cemetery’s reputation: after all, if a circus showman and a convicted quack could command grand monuments only a hundred yards or so from the blood royal, what miracles of social acceptance could the cemetery not achieve?” (*Mortal Remains* 13). The cemeteries became an indication of the union, in death at least, of meritocracy and aristocracy, and were an expression of middle-class aspiration to the material trappings of traditional aristocracy – clearly defined and guarded boundaries, family vaults, landscaped gardens, and a sense of dynastic heritage – all of which connoted security of rank and status.

The self-help model of individual success lauded by the middle class effectively portrayed the lower classes as undeserving of the respect conveyed by a respectable funeral: “If prosperity and respectability were held to be the inevitable outward signs and consequences of inner moral worth, then it followed that those who failed in the competitive struggle to make a living and succeed were morally unfit” (Morris 8).¹⁰ The cemeteries show the middle class protecting itself from the contaminating influence of the working class. Burial in a private cemetery was a public celebration of personal wealth, individualism, and a reassuring continuation of familial ties. In stark contrast, the mode of interment available to the lower classes was effectively a punishment for poverty, entailing threats to the integrity of the body, the denial of individuality, and essentially rendering an entire class anonymous. Ideal modes of remembrance and commemoration were put beyond the reach of the lower classes, their unattainability

¹⁰ “Belief in Samuel Smiles’ assertion in *Self-Help*, ‘What some men are, all without difficulty might be. Employ the same means, and the same result will follow,’ provided a comforting glow of self-approbation for the well-to-do, but was a bleak judgement of personal inadequacy on those already suffering the physical hardships of poverty” (Morris 8).

signalling the respectability of those who could afford to pay such respects to themselves and their family members.

Brooks observes that the churchyard “was the *locus classicus* for the new middle-class attitudes towards the dead, a synthesis of sentimentalism and picturesque. At Kensal Green this coextended with the cemetery’s appeal to class status and aspiration” (*Mortal remains* 15). In his influential book, *The Laying Out, Planting, and Managing of Cemeteries, and on the Improvement of Churchyards*, published in 1843, John Claudius Loudon defined the primary function of burial grounds as the disposal of the dead in such a way that their decomposition would not injure the living, either by affecting their health or by “shocking their feelings, opinions, or prejudices. A *secondary object* is or ought to be, the improvement of the moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and more especially of the great masses of society” (qtd. in Curl 81-82). Among the material aspects of death which could contribute to this were the monuments erected and epitaphs inscribed for the commemoration of the dead. The *laissez faire* policies of the private and public cemeteries regarding modes of memorialising meant that a monument could be “as expensive as piety, affection or aggrandizement wanted it to be” (C. Brooks 28). There was considerable contemporary debate throughout the century as to the most appropriate and desirable means of respecting the dead and commemorating their memory.

Dickens’ Attitude in His Non Fictional Writings

Dickens was an active participant in this debate which, as part of the wider issue of burial reform, found expression in the weekly journals that he edited, *Household Words*, 1850-59 and *All the Year Round*, 1859 until his death in 1870. It is worth noting

that the attitudes present in Dickens' journals regarding funeral and mourning customs, undertakers and interment, correspond with the attitudes present in his fictional writings, indicating a consistency of opinion and treatment that may not always be found between Dickens the journalist and editor and Dickens the novelist. Dickens strongly favoured burial reform in both his public and his personal roles, and not just for sanitation reasons. The costly and ornate accoutrements of funerals were anathema to Dickens who favoured simplicity as the most respectful way of honouring the dead with the concomitant benefit that this was also more fiscally prudent. Sanders argues that Dickens abhorred funerary customs and the panoply of the undertaker's shop because "he found them *un-natural* and a false expression of a real enough grief. They intruded themselves between the mourner and the mourned, and, rather than helping to purge the sense of loss, they dramatised its horror and served as an affront to both commemoration and understanding" (18-19).

Dickens would have concurred with Chadwick's assessment of funeral outlay as ridiculous and sinful, opposed as he was to the props of the undertaker's trade and to the almost compulsory assumption of mourning attire which accounted for a substantial portion of the ceremony and cost of a funeral.

In his articles, as in his fiction, Dickens relentlessly satirised the socially-prescribed rules relating to mourning dress. The code of etiquette governing what should and should not be worn by the bereaved was extensive, complicated and sometimes confused. Mourning had little effect on men's attire and social activity, but was very exacting for women. Jalland notes that a widow "was required to wear full black mourning for two years, gradually changing into the colours of half mourning, such as grey and lavender, for the last six months. The dress also implied social isolation, since

no invitations could be accepted in the first year and public places of resort were to be avoided” (“Death, Grief, and Mourning” 183). The expense involved could be prohibitive, especially initially, as it became the custom to supply items of mourning for all the clergy involved and the undertaker’s men as well as for the family and friends that attended the funeral. Simplicity of mourning attire was possible but the pressure to “keep up with the Grundys” (see footnote 12) made extravagance difficult to avoid, particularly as undertakers were more than willing to pander to and profit from society’s ignorance and, in Dickens’ opinion, its inappropriate preoccupation with respectability rather than respect. Dickens consistently expressed the view that excessive and complicated mourning conventions and funerary trappings “can in no way benefit the defunct, or comfort surviving friends, or gratify anybody but the mob, and the street boys” (“Address from an Undertaker to the Trade” 302). He believed that the widespread tendency to interpret funeral paraphernalia as a sliding scale by which to measure respect for the dead gave the undertaking trade an unregulated opportunity to manipulate the bereaved and reap financial rewards from death.

It may be risking understatement to say that Dickens was generally unsympathetic to undertakers. He disliked the power they wielded, the jobbery of the system, and their commercial exploitation of personal loss. The reform movement which eventually succeeded in gaining Parliamentary support and legislative intervention in the 1850s affected the provision of funerals as well as the creation of new cemeteries. The Metropolitan Interments Act of 1850 stipulated that a Board of Health

could receive tenders for contracts for the undertaking of funerals

‘according to Classes arranged with reference to the Nature and Amount

of the Matters and Services to be furnished and rendered, but so that in respect of the lowest of such Classes the Funeral may be conducted with Decency and Solemnity. . . .’ The Board could, if it so wished, contract separately for different services for each funeral – obviously an attempt to stop sub-contracting – and was to publish the scale of charges for funerals. (Morley 51)

Undertakers realized the implications of these provisions and protested strenuously against the Act, their opposition proving fine satiric material for those like Dickens who were unsympathetic to the undertakers.

“From the Raven in the Happy Family” *Household Words* 8 June 1850, illustrates Dickens’ participation in this most topical of issues. With the Raven as his mouthpiece, Dickens ridicules the genteel aspirations of funerals by which undertakers are able to exploit notions of “respectability.” For Dickens, the commonplace expression that funerals are “performed” becomes the most appropriate description of the funerary “masquerade.” He remarks that the undertakers’ men are “performing drunkards,” “[A]ll hot and red in the face with eating and drinking,” (241), an observation recorded in Chadwick’s 1843 Report.¹¹ The dialogue between an undertaker and customer keenly satirises the manipulation of social expectations by which the undertaker profited.¹²

¹¹ “[T]he undertaker’s men, who always take whatever drink is given them, are frequently unfit to perform their duty, and have reeled in carrying the coffin. [. . .] The men who stand as mutes at the door, as they stand out in the cold, are supposed to require most drink, and receive it most liberally” (*Interment in Towns* 60).

¹² “‘Hearse and four, Sir?’ says he. ‘No, a pair will be sufficient.’ ‘I beg your pardon, Sir, but when we buried Mr. Grundy at number twenty, there were four on them, Sir; and I think it right to mention it.’ ‘Well, perhaps there had better be four.’ ‘Thank you, Sir. Two coaches and four, Sir, shall we say?’ ‘No. Coaches and pair.’ ‘You’ll excuse my mentioning it, Sir, but pairs to the coaches and four to the hearse, would have a singular appearance to the neighbours. When we put four to anything, we always carry four right through.’ ‘Well! Say four!’ ‘Thank you, Sir. Feathers of course?’ ‘No. No feathers. They’re absurd.’ ‘Very good, Sir. No feathers?’ ‘No.’ *Very good, Sir. We can do fours without feathers, Sir, but it’s what we never*

Dickens did not stop with criticism of the undertakers: he also sought to assign responsibility to those who fostered the social pressure to conform to conventional notions of propriety and respectability, and the Raven addresses the readers thus: “You perfectly understand – you who are not the poor, and ought to set ‘em an example – that, besides making the whole thing costly, you’ve confused their minds about this burying, and have taught ‘em to confound expence and show, with respect and affection. You know all you’ve got to answer for, you gen-teel parties?” (242). These genteel parties would have constituted a large part of Dickens’ middle-class readership.

The Raven denounces the lapse between the reality of funerals and the prescribed service for the dead:

[D]on’t I know that you almost begin it with the words, ‘We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out’?¹³
Don’t I know that in a monstrous satire on these words, you carry your hired velvets, and feathers, and scarves, and all the rest of it, to the edge of the grave, and get plundered [. . .] in every article, because you will be gen-teel parties to the last? (241)

The Raven mocks the genteel complacency that tolerates such a situation and exhorts the public to support the proposed Metropolitan Interments Bill because it will enable them “to separate death from life; to surround it with everything that is sacred and solemn, and to dissever it from everything that is shocking and sordid” (242). Having sardonically

do. When we buried Mr. Grundy, there were feathers, and – I only throw it out, Sir – Mrs. Grundy might think it strange.’ ‘Very well! Feathers!’ ‘Thank you, Sir,’ – and so on” (“From the Raven in the Happy Family” 241-42).

¹³ This anticipates allusions to the service for the dead in *Great Expectations* where, with other aspects of death, it informs the presentation and interpretation of Pip’s desire for genteel respectability.

applauded the undertakers' disturbance of a meeting in favour of the Bill, the Raven gleefully announces "that they have unanimously passed a resolution that the closing of the London churchyards will be an insult to their professional brethren [. . .]. No General Interments. Carrion for ever!" (242) In the issue a week earlier, 1 June 1850, an undertaker in the article "A Popular Delusion" asks in regard of the Bill: "What's to become of my old hands who haven't been what you may call rightly sober these twenty years? Ain't there any religious feeling in the country?" (221).

Undertakers were again the target of Dickens' reforming pen before the Bill became law in August 1850 in his "Address from an Undertaker to the Trade (Strictly Private and Confidential)," *Household Words* 22 June 1850. Although funeral reform gradually made inroads to the system of jobbery that operated in the undertaking trade, Dickens had cause to return to the topic two years later in "Trading in Death," *Household Words* 27 November 1852. This article was written on the eve of the Duke of Wellington's state funeral which Dickens regarded as a serious step backwards for reform.

The Duke's funeral has been regarded as the epitome of Victorian funerary extravagance and ostentation and there was much criticism of it at the time, particularly as it proved an obvious counterpoint to the recently passed Metropolitan Burial Act. Dickens offers his middle-class readers examples of persons of note who left instructions for simple, private and quiet funerals, such as the Duke of Sussex who "desired to be laid, in the equality of death, in the cemetery of Kensal Green, and not with the pageantry of a State Funeral in the Royal vault at Windsor" (241).¹⁴ By comparison, the Duke's funeral

¹⁴ Dickens here betrays some of the class ambivalence discussed previously in writing thus of the "equality of death" that is supposedly offered by Kensal Green.

is “a pernicious instance and encouragement of the demoralising practice of trading in Death” (242). In Dickens’ view the profiteering activities spawned by the Duke’s death do more than dishonour the dead: a State Funeral at this time might injure “the cause of a great reform most necessary for the benefit of all classes of society” (244). This article articulates Dickens’ constant opposition to practices that confuse “funeral expense and pomp with funeral respect” (244).

In an article that indicates the passing of years and the mark of reform, Dickens wrote “The City of London Churchyards” for his *Uncommercial Traveller* series in *All the Year Round* 18 July 1863. Although these old churchyards failed to facilitate the ideal memorialising process, Dickens had been fascinated by their squalor and putrefaction. They intrigued him still in their more salubrious disused state, providing unexpected retreats and quaint sights in the heart London’s commercial centre. He takes the reader through some of the churchyards that he likes to wander around in the weekends, when the City is quiet and a sense of desertion pervades. He enjoys the transition from the hidden churchyards to the “hushed resorts of business” (405); even in a light article such as this, there is a connection between places of death and places of commerce, where the vaults of banks were once monastery crypts.

As well as indicating Dickens’ involvement in the reform movement which primarily dealt with burial grounds and the undertaking trade, the journals offer an opportunity to note Dickens’ attitude to memorialising techniques in a public, non-fictional forum, if not explicitly in articles by him, then implied through his editorial approval of others. Indicating the enduring importance of the sites and techniques of memorialising, an article titled “Sacred to the Memory” appeared in *All the Year Round*

30 June 1866, by which time the provision of public cemeteries was well under way. The unidentified writer blames the English habit of “self-depreciation” (503) for the abject state of public buildings, monuments and gardens, and is thankful for the recent efforts that have produced burial grounds “less monotonous and distressing to the eye” (593). Reflecting on the old London churchyards, the writer complains that there was “no attempt to present death under its softened and less terrible aspect. [. . .] The ornamentation and the general look of the modern cemetery is a vast improvement on those dreadful old burying-grounds” (593) and the article goes on to comment on appropriate churchyard sculpture. The writer takes Highgate as an example of the profusion of “urns and obelisks as would lead him [the reader] to the belief [. . .] that they were the insignia of England’s religion” (593), a sentiment not infrequently expressed in criticism of the planning and design of cemeteries. The writer says of the English national character that “we are at once extremely docile and extremely bigoted in matters of opinion. We believe what we are told to believe and stick to it’ [. . .] We have an enormous respect for what are called professional people, and are guided by their annunciations in an extraordinary degree” (594). Instead of deferring to the undertaker, people now defer to the “sepulchral monumentalist” who advises customers thus: “We set up a very great number of these, sir, and they are found to give general satisfaction” (594), indicating the resilience of Grundyism. Dickens would have sanctioned the writer’s observation that

[n]either our tombstones nor the inscriptions on them should be of a fantastic sort. Heaven knows that the presence of fancy or even of eccentricity, as displayed in the construction of a monument or the

wording of an epitaph, does not necessarily indicate anything of indifference to their loss in the hearts of those who have caused such monuments to be set up; still, they are apt to convey that impression.

Fanciful monuments and inscriptions, then, are objectionable. (594-95)

This assertion of the most appropriate modes of commemoration and memorialising echoes an 1852 article by James Hannay titled “Graves and Epitaphs” which appeared in *Household Words* 16 October 1852. It being too soon for the Burial Acts to have effected any reform yet, the “wretched places of skulls which disfigure and disgrace the great town” (105) are compared unfavourably with one of the new cemeteries which, like the idyllic rustic country churchyard, evoke “thoughts of beauty and hope in the minds of those who choose to wander among the gravestones” (105). Hannay draws on the popular metaphor of cemeteries as books of remembrance: “Every man has one chance of being ‘read;’ he may hope to have a reader for his gravestone” (106). As such, the question arises whether epitaphs are liable to criticism because

[a]n epitaph is strictly a publication. [. . .] An epitaph publishes itself in open sunshine to all the world; and, indeed, has a far better chance of being read, than one book out of every hundred. It professes always to inform, to instruct, to warn, to describe. It is one of those things which everybody thinks himself competent to compose; yet a good epitaph is one of the rarest things in literature. (106)

Hannay invites the reader to join him in a “strict scrutiny of our modern epitaphs” and begins by defining the epitaph “in its simplicity, as an inscription on a tomb. That idea implies the preservation of the memory of the dead” (106). Hannay gives various

examples of epitaphs to illustrate his distinction between “a natural and an unnatural style of [literary] ornament; the essential distinction lying in the sincerity or the want of sincerity visible” (106), concluding that “the simple epitaph (but with no affectation in the simplicity) is the most perfect” (107) and that “the one thing to be avoided is conventionalism and the mere mimicry of literary epitaphs. Of the mechanical part of sorrow, there is too much as it is in the arrangements of our funerals. Why perpetuate it on our tombs?” (107-08). Dickens would have approved of these sentiments in both his editorial and personal capacity, as he would have of the condemnation of ornate, heathen elements in the cemeteries, such as naked figures with inverted torches, urns and “elaborate broken columns” (108); he would have concurred that the costliness of memorial monuments neither negates nor compensates for “many instances of bad taste” (108); above all, Dickens would have agreed that “[a] gravestone is no place for anger or for taking your revenge for misconduct” (109), a sentiment in harmony with that which promoted the graveside reverie as a proper and important Victorian activity. At the tomb, the physical reminder of both the past presence and the present absence of the deceased, “tender fictions” aid the commemoration of the dead and the memorialising process, undertaken appropriately, comforts the living, enabling the balance to be struck between mourning and memory that is essential for a life of harmony and balance. As the discussion of the novels will demonstrate, this is what David and Pip are seeking.

The concept of “tender fictions” encapsulates the attitudes found in Dickens’ journal articles towards commemoration of the dead; it derives from and contributes to the existing debate as to appropriate memorialising techniques. An influential source of ideas for the nineteenth-century concern with memorialising, and mentioned in some of

the aforementioned journal articles, was Wordsworth who wrote three essays upon epitaphs. His sentiments appealed to the nineteenth-century sense of self as he refuted Samuel Johnson's belief that most epitaphs are mundane because "the greater part of mankind have no character at all" (qtd. in Wordsworth 128). Responding to this criticism, Wordsworth wrote that the "[t]he objects of admiration in human nature are not scanty, but abundant: and every man has a character of his own, to the eye that has skill to perceive it" (128). Whereas Johnson believed that falsehoods were created by the use of fantasy and fiction in epitaphs, Wordsworth argued that the "tender haze" or "luminous mist" surrounding the deceased produced a softened memory, a "tender fiction." An epitaph created in this spirit "is truth hallowed by love – the joint off-spring of the worth of the dead and the affections of the living" (130). The "tender haze" that David Copperfield creates around the memory of his mother and Steerforth utilises this epitaphic convention, although questions arise as to the success of David's memorialising. *David Copperfield* demonstrates a concern with memory that is present in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. All three works appeared in the same year and have been described as the "supreme English works of memory" (Schlicke 152). Gilmour also draws upon Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode* in discussing the elegiac tone of *David Copperfield*, its mourning of people and sensations irrevocably lost: "[T]he book's epigraph might well be taken from the *Immortality Ode*: 'Though nothing can bring back the hour / Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower; / We will grieve not, rather find / Strength in what remains behind'" ("Memory" 40).¹⁵

¹⁵ For some discussions of *David Copperfield* that consider Wordsworth see Philip Davis, Edwin M. Eigner, and Alan Shelton.

Philip Davis uses Wordsworth as the basis for his argument “that no art delivers memory ‘naturally’, unaffected by the fact of the memory being written; that, accordingly, the so-called ‘real’ works of feeling are highly dependent upon the so-called ‘artificial’ disposition and language” (preface xxxi-xxxii). For Wordsworth, epitaphs were

a model for the merest origins of the seriousness of the idea of men writing. Epitaphs: the last words formally managed, a few basic words carved on stone, the human hope for permanence marked there between immortality above and remembrance below; yet, though lofty, accessible in simplicity to all men who can read them, while also bare and exposed not only to the eyes of men but to the day, to the elements and to time.

(Davis 5)

Appropriate modes of memorialising thus require a softened memory of the dead and the epitaph becomes the material aspect of death that best serves the imaginative process of creation and censorship upon which memorialising depends. David and Pip utilise the memorialising process with varying degrees of success in their narratives of memory, inscriptions of self that particularly indicate Dickens’ participation in the memorialising process.

The nineteenth-century cemeteries offered the ideal locale and conditions for the ideal form of memorialising, providing a suitable moral and physical environment.¹⁶

They became sites where mourning and remembering mingled in the memorialising process by which the loss of the dead was made bearable, the dead being reinterpreted

¹⁶ The moral effect of the cemetery was a Victorian preoccupation; there ‘vice looks terrible, virtue lovely; selfishness a sin, patriotism a duty’; the cemetery was ‘the tenderest and most uncompromising monitor of man’. (Loudon qtd. in Morley 48). See also Loudon’s comment on moral sentiments qtd. p.18.

and represented by the living in such a way so as to make to make their memory pleasing. Cemeteries thus not only reflected an urban sanitation problem produced by dramatic demographic changes but also social changes which proved particularly sensitive to developing bourgeois interests and the perception of the family, living and dead. Aries points out that “personal visits to the tombs of loved ones were unknown before the eighteenth century” (qtd. in C. Brooks 4). This development in funerary custom has been identified as originating from what has been called “the affectionate family” (C. Brooks 4), a product of eighteenth-century middle-class values that placed great value on a sentient awareness of the dead. Not only was the grave sacred because of the desire for bodily resurrection and “the need for the resurrected body to be individually intact” (C. Brooks 4); it was also important to have a specific place associated with the dead person, where their memory could be evoked and cherished. Thus, the tomb acted “as a spur to imaginatively resurrecting the dead” (C. Brooks 5).

Graveside contemplation enabled the dead to be recalled, their memory softened by the influence of Romanticism and sentiment (C. Brooks 5). Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* demonstrates the eighteenth-century shift in attitudes to mortality that shaped the nineteenth-century ideal: “Even as transience is acknowledged, imagination and memory recreate the dead as actors in an idyll of rustic life” (C. Brooks 5).¹⁷ The system of intramural burial in London in the early decades of the nineteenth century clearly did

¹⁷ Brooks refers to the parodying of Gray’s poem by *Punch* in “An Elegy, written in a London Churchyard,” published in the autumn of 1849: “In lampooning Gray, *Punch* presented the burial crisis not just as a problem of public health, but as a grotesque moral and psychological threat to the whole complex of middle-class attitudes towards death and remembrance, of which the original ‘Elegy’ is such a prime document” (C. Brooks 44). The *Punch* elegy’s final verses, says Brooks, “[P]oint both the miasmatic moral and the way towards a remedy” (44): “No longer seek Corruption to enclose / Within the places of mankind’s abode: / But far from cities let our dust repose, / Where daisies blossom on the verdant clod” (44). Dickens was not immune to the influence that Gray’s *Elegy* exercised over the popular imagination in matters of remembrance: there are allusions to the work in *Great Expectations* as one of the aspects of death by which Pip’s progress may be observed.

not meet the functional needs of the populace, and fell far short of the dominant imaginative and commemorative ideals. Violation of the grave due to body-snatching and the pressure of increased mortality on the already full city churchyards were urban threats: they undermined the values of the urban middle class, and they “constituted a sacrilegious attack upon the pieties of sentiment, upon the contemplative tomb, upon the domesticated dead” (C. Brooks 6).¹⁸ For the Victorians, the memorialising process, the ways and means by which the dead were remembered appropriately, was an important part of the ability to live appropriately. How one respects and remembers the dead has implications for one’s life, and how one relates to oneself, to others and to society, which is what we find in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*.

Dickens’ Personal Experience of Death

Having examined the social context of death for the Victorians and surveyed Dickens’ participation in the public debate over the form and function of funerary practices, it is instructive to consider the personal experience of death that had great significance for Dickens: the sudden death of Mary Hogarth, his young sister-in-law, in May 1837. Dickens’ relationship with Mary and the effect of her death on Dickens and on his writing have been much debated: it is not within the purview of this thesis to enter that discussion, but it is worth noting the material facts of Mary’s death and the cultivation of her memory by Dickens because of their significance for Dickens as a novelist.

¹⁸ In *The Cemetery. A Brief Appeal to the feelings of Society on Behalf of Extra Mural Burial*, 1848, the anonymous poet compares the “bloated earth miasma’s breath, / The full-fed taint of undigested death” of urban burial grounds with the idyllic country churchyards “[w]here sleep the rustic congregation.” The poet prays that “[c]emeteries win the people’s heart; / Though lowly lay secure the weary head, / And in the tomb domesticate the dead” (qtd. in Curl 136-37).

Mary's death was Dickens first adult experience of close, personal bereavement, the shock of which was increased by Mary's youth and the sudden nature of her death. She died in Dickens' home, in his arms, and was buried in the first private cemetery, the recently opened Kensal Green, in a double plot purchased by Dickens who hoped eventually to be buried there too. Given that the cemetery had begun operating only that year, Dickens' readiness to purchase a plot in perpetuity for a family member and for himself reveals some of Dickens' concerns at this stage in his life. Newly successful, recently married, seeking to establish himself both in literature and in society, the acquisition of a plot in London's first private cemetery resonates with all the anxieties and aspirations as to class and status demonstrated by the development of private cemeteries and shows Dickens responding to the very attributes of the suburban cemeteries that were designed to appeal most strongly to middle-class sensibility. In aligning himself with the middle-class values and commemorative ideals that the cemeteries represented and from which they also sought to benefit, Dickens may be seen as attempting to shape a particular identity for himself: the respectable, successful young novelist who had overcome certain disadvantages and obstacles to achieve recognition and acclaim by exercising the middle-class virtues of which *David Copperfield* is such a paean and *Great Expectations* a more searching critique.

In mourning Mary, Dickens conformed to some of the contemporary rituals, particularly the possession of mementoes of the dead. He wore a ring from her finger for the rest of his life, kept a locket that he had given her, and had a mourning-locket made with a lock of her hair. Dickens later relinquished the second place in the grave, allowing one of her brothers to be buried there, but this distressed him: "The desire to be buried

next her is as strong upon me now as it was five years ago; and I *know* (for I don't think that there ever was love like that I bear her) that it will never diminish . . . I cannot bear the thought of being excluded from her dust . . . It seems like losing her a second time" (qtd. in Schlicke 278). The scientific fact of bodily decomposition by which Dickens had hoped that people would realize the folly of funerary extravagance does not negate his own acceptance of the body's significance in the commemorative and imaginative process that characterised the nineteenth-century relationship with the dead. Dickens' memorialising of Mary demonstrates that he, too, engaged in this process. It is commonly observed that he "constructed her as an icon of angelic sweetness and purity" (Schlicke 278), believing that "so perfect a creature never breathed . . . She had not a fault" (qtd. in Schlicke 278). These sentiments are the reformulation of the epitaph that Dickens composed for Mary and that is inscribed on her headstone: "Young, beautiful, and good, God in His Mercy Numbered her with his Angels At the early age of Seventeen" (qtd. in Schlicke 278). However, this epitaphic inscription comprises just one aspect of the memorialising of Mary.

Intensely attached to the memory of his dead sister-in-law, Dickens fictionalised her throughout his writing career, beginning with the figure of Rose Maylie who appeared in *Oliver Twist* about a year after Mary's death: "She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions" (264; ch. 29). Rose is taken suddenly ill, like Mary, "and Dickens later relives in fiction that terrible May night of 1837 but with the power to make it end happily" (Schlicke 279). Of *The Old Curiosity Shop* it has been observed that Dickens "consciously reactivated his grief

for Mary to help himself into the frame of mind for describing the death of Little Nell” (Schlicke 278), Dickens himself revealing in a letter that “[d]ear Mary died yesterday, when I think of this sad story” (qtd. in Schlicke 278). Denied the possibility of reunion with Mary in the grave, many critics have discussed the ways that the desire for “reunion with Mary infiltrated Dickens’ fiction” (Schlicke 279). It is to the purpose to consider whether the inscription of Mary in Dickens’ “works of fantasy” enabled him to achieve the ideal balance of mourning and memory that is requisite for a balanced life: accepting the past in such a way as to create a harmonious present and an auspicious future.

David Copperfield and Great Expectations

Discussions of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* invariably commence with Dickens’ own, perhaps infamous, comment linking these two bildungsroman in a letter to Forster: “To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly imagine” (Forster 2: 285). This observation effectively invited comparisons between the two novels, comparisons that have identified similarities as well as differences. For instance, Pearlman draws attention to the numerous repetitions between *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*:

Neither Dickens nor Forster thought it worth mentioning that the heroes of both novels were abused orphans who come from the provinces to make good in London; that each struggles for emotional and moral maturity, eventually to find true education in the death of a loved one and in foreign travel; that each is placed in a situation where he must choose between two

women, one loved with real passion and one admired as a sister. Neither Dickens nor Forster took notice of the coincidental prominence in each novel of the law and lawyers, prisons and prisoners, defective education, Australia, or even of the obvious device of allowing each hero to be attended by a simple, loyal, and undervalued companion (i.e., Traddles and Pocket). (190-91)

Turning to a quite obvious similarity between the two works, Forster thought it a “mere coincidence” that both works began in graveyards (Pearlman 190). However, it is here suggested that this is no unconscious coincidence given the extent to which death and the trappings of death pervade the relationships between moral growth, self-identity, and class that are present in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. The memoir is an appropriate vehicle for the language and images of death that permeate these two works. Indeed, Dickens may be seen as appropriating the trappings of death, both to chart and to comment upon his heroes’ progress, and also to produce the two works that, taken together, are the closest he comes to writing his memoirs and which most specifically meet the hope expressed in his will: “I rest my claims to my remembrance of my country upon my published works” (Forster 2: 422).

With regard to this, the connections between “memoir” and “memorialise” indicate the potential pertinence of the language and attributes of death to the exploration of moral growth, identity, and class in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. A memoir is “an autobiography or a written account of one’s memory of certain events or people,” the root being “memory.”¹⁹ To memorialise is to commemorate, in the form of “an object, institution, or custom established in memory of a person or event,” also from

¹⁹ Definitions are from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. 8th ed. 1990.

“memory.” “Memory” includes “the faculty by which things are recalled to or kept in the mind,” “one’s store of things remembered,” and “a recollection or remembrance,” the root of which means mindful and remembering, and is related to “mourn.” The definition of “mourn” is to “feel or show deep sorrow or regret for (a dead person, a lost thing, a past event),” and to “show conventional signs of grief for a period after a person’s death.”

Both the first-person narrators of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* utilise aspects of memorialising and epigraphy in the inscription of their lives. These two texts thus demonstrate a memorialising impulse similar to that behind the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century epitaphs and epitaph anthologies. The circulation of these collected inscriptions meant that the “printed page substituted for, even at times supplanted, the commemorative function of epitaphs” (Vita 14). Of Dickens’ works, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* particularly share this commemorative function. *David Copperfield* is David’s attempt to create his own memorial by inscribing an ideal memory both for and of himself, and *Great Expectations* represents Pip’s epitaphic request for understanding, compassion and forgiveness. Furthermore, Dickens’ belief in literature’s instructive, affective, and entertaining function was similar to the intention of Victorian epitaph anthologists to edify and amuse. Vita (like C. Brooks) notes the connection between ideology and commemorative methods: epitaphs and epitaph anthologies were a reminder “that class and social rank not only were, but should be, preserved through monuments” (16). *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* inscribe issues of class and respectability as part of the “alternative form of commemoration” (Vita 19) that their narrators offer on Dickens’ behalf.

CHAPTER 2: DAVID COPPERFIELD

David Copperfield is a most appropriate text by which to consider Dickens' testamentary claim to remembrance, it being the first of Dickens' novels in which the fusion between the inscription of memory and the inscription of fiction is explicitly rendered. Moreover, this occurs in a text whose main preoccupations have been frequently identified as the search for a stable identity, gentility, and death. The nature of this work, occupying as it does a central position both in Dickens' canon and in his life as an autobiographical fiction, is complicated by the almost verbatim incorporation of parts of Dickens' abandoned autobiographical fragment. Moreover, some of the life experiences that mark David's ascension to the figure of successful novelist are closely bound to Dickens' own experiences, often being imaginatively shaped to achieve the imaginative realisation of an ideal state of being that Dickens sometimes thought lacking in his life. The inclusion of Dickens' autobiographical account in the fictional work *David Copperfield* lends to the first fourteen chapters in particular the tenor of fictional autobiography. *David Copperfield* represents a tender fiction that is absent from Dickens' tombstone, and it is the tender fiction of a life and an identity remembered as imagined and inscribed by Dickens himself. As he wrote to Forster in a letter of 10 July 1849 during the incorporation of the autobiographical Warren's Blacking Warehouse episode into the serialisation of *David Copperfield*, he believed that he had "done it ingeniously, and with a very complicated interweaving of truth and fiction" (*David Copperfield* introduction xii). However, it is proposed to discuss *David Copperfield* at this point with regard to David's relationship to the text as character and narrator, examining his

memories, his experiences of death, and his inscription of his life. The implications of Dickens' intensely personal connection with this novel, his "favourite child," will be discussed more fully in the concluding section (119-29) which will explicate the significance of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* as texts that testify most fully to the memorialising function of Dickens' "published works."

David Copperfield is a novel about memorialising; that is to say, its objective is the creative shaping of memory into an acceptable and palatable form while simultaneously aspiring to a truthful inscription of people and events. As a text, it captures the attempt to achieve a balance between truth and the creative process through the process of writing. It is possible to examine the way in which the novel is also deeply interested in memorialising the dead and revealing the difficulties involved in reconciling the tension between life and death, acceptance and grief. The concerns with selfhood, gentility and memory that this novel explicates, whether consciously or not, are complex issues given the multiplicity of possible memorialisers and inscribers that may be identified in *David Copperfield*.

David Copperfield is exceptionally concerned with the search for identity, particularly a genteel one, the nature of memory, and the creative process by which these things are made text. The novel purports to be *The personal history of David Copperfield* but it is ultimately an inherently ambiguous product due to the complex interaction of the above concerns. The full title indicates the ambiguities that characterise this novel: *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, and Observations of David Copperfield the Younger, of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to be Published on Any Account)*. This, then, is a private memoir that has, in the fictional sense, unintentionally

been made public. This fundamental contradiction invites consideration of the extent to which David writes both *of* and *for* himself, and how he constructs himself in his “life’s work.” This in turn entails questions of how David and his work are to be read.

It has often been observed that the text of *David Copperfield* is marked by the four retrospects in which David comments upon his life as it has unfolded and as he has written it.²⁰ There is another way of noting David’s, and the text’s, development: by examining the four encounters that David has with the undertaker, Mr Omer. These encounters are significant indicators of David’s personal development, occurring as they do at textually important moments: his mother’s death (ch. 9), his return to Blunderstone and the introduction of Steerforth to Emily (ch. 21), Barkis’ death and the elopement (ch. 30), and his accompanying Dan to Yarmouth with the news of Emily’s return (ch. 51). This final meeting with Omer and the events of this time occur against the backdrop of Dora’s fatal illness. The value of these encounters for David and the reader is enhanced by the presence of other characters’ experiences of death in David’s life. In particular, the various modes of mourning and memorialising observed by Mr. Wickfield, Mrs. Steerforth and Betsey offer the most explicit instruction to David in successfully managing bereavement. Indeed, given the novel’s concern with memorialising the past, it is an important part of David’s development that he is made aware of and comes to accept the balance between life and death, the “two ends of life” (600; ch. 51) as Omer puts it. Arguably the most important lesson that David is expected to learn in life is how to appropriately mourn for that which has been lost, whether this is people or the past.

²⁰ For instance, Ford, George, H. “Dickens and the Voices of Time.” *NLF* 24 (1970): 428-48; Gilmour (“Memory”); and Hornback, Bert G. “The Hero Self.” *Dickens Studies Annual* 7 (1978): 151-62.

His encounters with Omer and the other instances of bereavement that punctuate the text thus act as a kind of barometer of David's growth.

David's Birth Days: Framed by Death

David Copperfield contains a good number of deaths, most of which are not directly witnessed by the narrator but which are thematically significant and morally instructive for David the character. From his entry into the novel as a posthumous child, David's story "includes the deaths of his mother, his infant brother, the previous tenant of his London rooms, his aunt's estranged husband, his beloved nurse's husband and her nephew, his own first child, who is stillborn, his first wife, her father and even her dog, and, finally, his own best friend and alternate identity" (Eigner 50). This quantity of deaths reflects the importance of bereavement, mourning and memory for David's moral, professional and social progress. The experiences of death in the course of David's life, if correctly addressed, should illuminate for him the problematic relationship between the past, that which is dead, and the present, that which exists, and the future, that which is to be. The tension between life and death, the undesirability of an imbalance between the past and the present, and the desirability of attaining an ideal reconciliation of these two influences by the appropriate use of memory are evident from the very start of the text with David's account of his birth and the revelation that his father died "six months before [he] came into the world" (3; ch. 1). Not only does this establish a relationship between life and death that is to be developed, but it also reveals the potential conflict between remembering and writing since the first chapter of David's memoir is arguably the most fictional: it consists almost entirely of David's account of received information.

In an overt gesture of narratorial honesty regarding the events of his birth day, David states that “I can make no claim [. . .] to have known, at that time, how matters stood; or to have any remembrance, founded on the evidence of my own senses, of what follows” (3). Presumably he has received his information for the first chapter of his personal history from other characters – his mother, Aunt Betsey, Peggotty, Ham, and Mr. Chillip – but David does not restrict himself to a bare summary of facts. Thankfully for his (unsolicited) readers, he follows Dickens’ example and interweaves fact and fiction, using fancy to touch up these received remembrances and appropriating them by marking them with the personal stamp of his imagination. For who but David-as-novelist would see his aunt’s eyes moving “like a Saracen’s Head in a Dutch clock” (4) or describe her as taking “her bonnet by the strings, in the manner of a sling” (10) to aim a blow at Mr. Chillip. And only David-as-novelist could transform the experiences and memories of others into the realistically-observed direct speech of Chapter 1, thus making these private remembrances serve his purpose for exposition, character and plot.

David’s story opens with his decision to “begin my life with the beginning of my life” (1), thus immediately establishing the double sense of his life as lived and his life as remembered and inscribed. Of necessity, then, David relies on the reports, remarks and observations of others. As well as this absence of narratorial independence and absolute authority, the opening chapter is structured around references to his father’s recent death, an event which has implications for David’s personal sense of self. David loses no time in describing himself as a posthumous child:

My father’s eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the

reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night. (2)

David's use of terms such as reflection, shadowy remembrance, gravestone, churchyard and compassion so early in his narrative indicates the importance that aspects of death have for his understanding of self and the inscription of his life.

David's birth occurs during a time of mourning, with his mother in widow's weeds and the fire in the best room "not having been lighted [. . .] since my father's funeral" (4). The chapter ends with David's birth and another reference to death, the moonlight shining on the churchyard and David Copperfield's grave: "The earthly bourne of all travellers, and the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he, without whom I had never been" (10). Chapter 1 constitutes the beginning of the text of David's life but is also pre-text: the events described are for the most part prior to David's birth which occurs at the very end of the chapter. "I am Born" signals the elements that will mark David's life: the presence of death in life, the birth of the self, the complementary function of memory and imagination if they are held in correct balance, the issues of narrative reliability and textual ambiguity, and the private inscription of an identity in a text that, despite its fictional narrator's intention that it, like Dickens's autobiographical fragment, not "see the light," is made available for public consumption.

If Chapter 1 is a reconstruction of events filtered through David's imagination, then Chapter 2 charts the development of his memory, beginning with the "first objects that assume a distinct presence for [him]" (10). Thus, the beginning of David's life shows

imagination coming before memory, and the transition from imagined memories to actual memories is marked by reservations as to the infallibility and longevity of memory:

David “believes” he can remember, and has an “impression on [his] mind which [he] cannot distinguish from actual remembrance” (10). After inscribing these impressions that might be memory David acknowledges that “[t]his may be fancy” (11) before defending the authenticity of his observations. Ostensibly, there is to be no possibility of challenging the recollection of David’s life now that he has formally entered the text. The adult David intervenes as narrator to pre-empt challenges to his memory and the authority of his writing: “[I]f it should appear from anything I may set down in this narrative that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics” (11). One of the memories which David recalls from “the blank of [his] infancy” (100) is sitting in the best parlour: “There is something of a doleful air about that room to me, for Peggotty has told me – I don’t know when, but apparently ages ago – about my father’s funeral, and the company having their black cloaks put on” (11). This is a reminder of David’s half-orphan status and also leads into the account of the Lazarus story which frightens David so much that “they are afterwards obliged to take me out of bed, and show me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom-window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest” (12). David’s home is so near the graveyard that David can see it from his “little bed in a closet within my mother’s room” (12) and in his memory it exists as the ideal memorialising environment, being green, shady and quiet. However, the reference to Lazarus hints at the potential insurrection of memory, the ineffaceable presence of disturbing memories that linger in the “shadows” of David’s remembrance.

The first few chapters of *David Copperfield* portray an idyllic existence for the young David, the loss of which is mourned by the adult David and pervades his text as he edits his memories in his written story and attempts to recapture this earlier perfection. This idyllic childhood depends upon the ideal family relationships that exist. David is a posthumous child and the knowledge that his father never saw him affects him throughout his life but, until Murdstone's arrival, David's father remains a part of the family in a way that conforms to the ideal Victorian methods for remembering the dead as discussed in Chapter 1 (15-18, 27-30). The churchyard where David Copperfield the Elder is buried is a rural one, representing the ideal rustic site of commemoration that the suburban cemeteries of the nineteenth century sought to replicate. The proximity of the churchyard to Blunderstone Rookery does not represent the hazardous encroachment of death on life that London's old inner-city burial grounds did: rather, it testifies to the continuation of those middle-class domestic ideals that celebrated the family in death as much as in life. David generally regards the churchyard with a suitably Victorian mindset by which means the dead were mourned but still connected with the family. As Chapter 1 (29-30) explains, for this to occur it was important that there be a place that was physically connected with the dead: a place for them to rest, intact, until (as all believing Victorians hoped) both the dead and the living were reunited.

However, David's text reveals an ambiguous attitude to the graveyard and his father's death which has implications for his emotional development. He first testifies to feeling an "indefinable compassion" for his father's gravestone "lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of the house were – almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes – bolted and locked

against it" (2). He also observes the green and shady tranquillity of the churchyard (12; ch. 2), but despite these observations the Lazarus story elicits a response from David that would seem to intimate an unconscious or unacknowledged desire that the dead should remain so; that David's Edenic childhood would be threatened and less idyllic if a father were to enter it, whether from the dead or from life. David's fear of the dead rising, as demonstrated in his reaction to the Lazarus story, hints at a childhood desire that his father stay at rest in his grave and the revelation that he has been thinking about remarriage intimates that, for David, the ideal father is a dead one and the ideal mother is a widowed one for whose love and attention David has no rival.²¹

Together, David and his mother are able to perform all the appropriate modes of memorialisation that accompanied the domestication of the dead: establishing monuments, visiting the grave and tending it. Their mourning is aided by the ideal environment of the churchyard: within sight of their home and pastoral in its situation and the presence of grazing sheep, this place of burial draws upon the romantic tradition that produced other memorialising works, such as Gray's *Elegy*. His father's death shapes David's sense of self from his "first childish associations with his white gravestone in the churchyard" (2; ch.1), to his adult years and the time of writing. Notwithstanding this enduring sense of strangeness and the ambiguities in David's attitude that his text reveals, his father's death is unproblematic in comparison with the deaths of which David is to have direct experience. An absence of actual memory about his father and the presence of him only ever as a dead parent, enable David to "remember" him in a manner that is free

²¹ Dickens returns to this scene with very different implications in *Great Expectations* when, in chapter one, Magwitch, Pip's "second father," rises from behind the gravestones of Pip's parents.

from the complex and creative memorialising that his mother's death involves and by which means David is able to imaginatively return to the earlier domestic ideal.

Clara's marriage to Murdstone represents a disruption to the family circle that has hitherto shaped David's reality. It is also an exception to the usual nineteenth-century experience as remarriage was not common for nineteenth-century widows. Pat Jalland has compared the nineteenth-century situation for widowers and widows, concluding that "[m]iddle- and upper-class widows generally had a tougher time than widowers, with no paid occupation to divert their time, more practical and financial hurdles to overcome, and little expectation of remarriage, except for the youngest and prettiest" (*Victorian Family* 230). Clara is most definitely an exception. For a wife and mother, let alone a widow, Clara Copperfield is "a very Baby" (4) and "unusually youthful in appearance even for her years" (4). Murdstone's companions refer to Clara as "[t]he pretty little widow" (18; ch. 2) and to David as "[b]ewitching Mrs. Copperfield's incumbrance" (18). Clara would have completed the two years mourning period that Victorian society demanded from widows by the time that Murdstone appears. David the narrator manages to convey through the observations of his younger self his mother's malleability and susceptibility to flattery. But occasionally David is unable to withhold his knowledge of what comes to pass and he allows pre-emptive interjections or judgements that his younger self was incapable of making. As he admits: "I liked [Murdstone] no better than at first, and had the same uneasy jealousy of him; but if I had any reason for it beyond a child's instinctive dislike, and a general idea that Peggotty and I could make much of my mother without any help, it certainly was not *the* reason that I might have found if I had been older" (17). As narrator David cannot fully control his memory with his

retrospective foreknowledge of events finding expression in such comments as Murdstone having “ill-omened black eyes” (15) or “confound his complexion, and his memory!” (18).

Clara Copperfield’s fall from grace in her son’s eyes is due to her marriage to Murdstone and even before Peggotty has informed David that he has “got a Pa!” David makes the connection between his mother’s remarriage and death: “Not dead, too! Oh, she’s not dead, Peggotty?” (33; ch. 3). This response bears some resemblance to David’s retrospective premonition of Emily’s fate a few pages earlier where he observes that it would have been better for Emily to have drowned in his sight without him trying to save her. Emily will betray him and his ideals by eloping with Steerforth, just as his mother betrays him and his childhood by re-marrying; as with Emily, a betrayal (of David) is foreshadowed by thoughts of death for the betrayer.

The problems that David has with remembering and rendering his mother stem from her marriage to Murdstone. Clara’s remarriage is clearly represented as inappropriate, involving as it does the disruption of David’s, until then, perfect existence and the betrayal of her son and her dead husband. Peggotty voices the opinion of both David Copperfield the Elder and the adult opinion of David Copperfield the Younger when she expostulates “[n]ot such a one as this, Mr Copperfield wouldn’t have liked,” (15; ch. 2). Murdstone is regarded as having usurped David’s father’s place: “Something [. . .] connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind” (34; ch. 4). This is a reminder of David’s ambiguous attitude to his father, implying that the presence of any father, let alone Murdstone, in the flesh would be an undesirable disruption of the family circle to which

David is accustomed. The text implies that the presence of any father would be felt by David as usurping his place in his mother's affections. David's apprehension of the dead rising is no longer easily assuaged by a reassuring glimpse of the graveyard. Indeed, the very opposite occurs and he is exiled from his bedroom near his mother to a room "a long way off" (34). This is the first of the exiles that David is subjected to after Clara's remarriage; the next is his being sent to boarding school, and the last is his time at the London warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby. Each exile takes David further away in place and time from the site of his happiest memories; the last exile signals the end of his childhood, as such, and also denies him the ideal proximity to his parents' graves.

David is informed of his mother's death on his birthday, an instance of Dickensian coincidence that reinforces the presence of death in life. David's first experience of death, then, is as a child and the impressions the narrator records are every much from a child's viewpoint. Even the title of chapter 9, "I Have a Memorable Birthday," intimates the inability of a child to fully comprehend death, as David defines the event in relation to himself. Becoming an orphan on his birthday underscores the fact that David's existence is positioned in the context of death. The importance of death and memory is also linked at the opening of this chapter as David proclaims that the event of his mother's death "seems to have swallowed up all lesser recollections, and to exist alone" (97). Alone, that is, except for the recollection that "Steerforth was more to be admired than ever [. . .] and was more spirited and independent [. . .] and therefore more engaging than before" (97). David thus deftly links the news of his mother's death with his admiration for the person who is to be the betrayer of his adult years, and who will also prove a difficult, indeed impossible, person to memorialise without censorship.

Summoned to the Creakles' parlour for what he expects is a birthday hamper from Peggotty, David is gently led by Mrs. Creakle to an awareness that his mother has died. This passage of the text is an illuminating example of the appropriate way of conveying the fact of bereavement. Mrs. Creakle begins with a general observation as to the inevitability of death: "You are too young to know how the world changes every day [. . .] and how the people in it pass away. But we all have to learn it, David; some of us when we are young, some of us when we are old, some of us at all times of our life" (98). This is an explicit statement of the life-lesson that death imparts and that is re-stated in various ways throughout the book. But the lesson is here beyond David's comprehension when expressed so generally. Mrs. Creakle employs a small fiction that effectively takes David through the stages of his mother's illness to her death. She mentions his mother's health and says that she has heard this morning that his "'mama is very ill. [. . .] She is very dangerously ill,' she added. I knew all now. 'She is dead'" (98).

David's First Encounter with Omer (Ch. 9)

Little thinking that he will never return to Salem House, David is met at Yarmouth by Mr Omer, who rebuts the observation that Dickens' fictional undertakers – Sowerberry, Mould, Omer and Trabb – "are uniformly offensive and intrusive" (Schlicke 155). Dickens generally depicted his undertakers as despicable creatures who conformed to the types found in his journals. That Omer is of a different cast is apparent in the first description of him as being "a fat, short-winded, merry-looking, little old man in black, with rusty little bunches of ribbons at the knees of his breeches, black stockings, and a broad-brimmed hat" (99). Furthermore, in the character of Mr Omer we find Dickens'

most sympathetic and textually important portrayal of an undertaker. This is a significant exception to the general Dickens rule regarding undertakers and, as such, warrants careful examination.

Mr. Omer is a key figure, recurring at important moments throughout David's life and narrative. He represents a balance between life and death and demonstrates an ease with memory that serves as a counterpoint to the inappropriate mourning and memorialising exhibited by other characters in *David Copperfield*. Omer comes to represent a constant in David's life: his knowledge of David's history is a comforting reminder to David of his place in the world, confirming his identity and social position. He also is a measure by which it is possible to check David's progress through life and to note effects of experiences of death on David's understanding of bereavement and mourning.

Unlike the downtrodden, desensitised parochial undertaker Sowerberry in *Oliver Twist*, or the professional urban undertaker that Dickens bitterly satirised in *Martin Chuzzlewit* in the character of Mr Mould, Omer's undertaking services are integrated into his overall business activities, as are those of Dickens' other rurally situated undertaker, Trabb, in *Great Expectations*.²² Omer's shop sign pronounces him to be a "Draper, Tailor, Haberdasher, Funeral Furnisher, &c" (99). Moreover, Omer's business is much more a truly family affair than Mould's: whereas Mould's daughters are merely surrounded by funeral paraphernalia as they grow up, Omer's daughter is actively involved in the business. The atmosphere of the shop is comfortable, not grim, and the people are welcoming and friendly to the young David. David notes "a breathless smell

²² In large cities, like London, it was possible to profit solely from undertaking activities. By comparison, rural undertakers found it necessary to fulfil a number of functions.

of warm black crape – I did not know what the smell was then, but I know now” (99). He recalls an instinctive knowledge that the “regular sound of hammering that kept a kind of tune” (99) was the sound of Joram building the coffin: “I had never heard one making; I had never seen one that I know of: but it came into my mind what the noise was, while it was going on; and when the young man entered, I am sure that I knew what he had been doing” (101).

Like Mrs. Creakle, Omer makes a general, philosophical observation as to the co-existence of life and death: he ruminates that “fashions are like human beings. They come in, nobody knows when, why, or how; and they go out, nobody knows when, why, or how. Everything is like life, in my opinion, when you look at it in that point of view” (100). David’s response to this is that he “was too sorrowful to discuss the question, which would possibly have been beyond me under any circumstances” (100). Throughout this encounter with Omer there is no doubt that David is ignorant of matters of death. The implication is that knowledge can only come with experience.

Omer, Minnie and Joram exemplify an acceptance of death in their appreciation of life that is quite beyond the child David’s comprehension. The consolation that Omer offers in his straightforward approach to death is the text’s most extreme presentation of the acceptance of life and death. His sanguine perspective, born of experience, is unfathomable to the orphaned David whose only actual experience of death thus far is his mother’s. In many ways, Omer’s attitude to death is exceptional and beyond the ability of those without his unique position for experiencing and observing death. His “comfortable” manner reflects an acceptance of death’s inevitability that makes life more comfortable, but which seems unnatural to the young David, inexperienced in matters of

death. Omer's advice to David not to mind his brother's death "more than you can help" (101) is a warning against the futility of excessive grief. His offer to present the finished coffin reflects a familiarity and acceptance of death which diminishes the fear that accompanies ignorance, but David's youth, inexperience, ignorance, and fear of death make him unreceptive to Omer's philosophy at this time.

Omer represents a connection with the dead that testifies to their enduring relevance for the Victorians. His relationship to the dead is conditioned by the nature of his occupation, which in turn affects his manner of dealing with the living. This is not in the manner of regarding them as prospective customers, but as part of a series of connections between the past and the present. Omer is the most unambiguous representative of this philosophy for living: he makes a living out of dying, one of the commonest slurs cast on undertakers, but not in the exploitative, insensitive way that usually characterizes Dickens' treatment of undertakers. Omer retains his humanity because he makes his experiences of death a means of forging connections with the living. As he remarks to David: "I have been acquainted with you a long time, my young friend. [. . .] All your life [. . .]. I may say before it. I knew your father before you" (100).²³

²³ The presence of Mr. Chillip, the doctor, at births and deaths is another example offered to David (and by David in his narrative) of the connection between life and death, an understanding of which serves as an indicator of moral and emotional growth. Mr. Chillip has attended both David's parents on their way out of the world as well as attending David's entrance in to it. He is "observed" by David in church one Sunday during his first inscribed thoughts of death: "I look up at the monumental tablets on the wall, and try to think of Mr. Bodgers late of this parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain. I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week" (12). Like Omer, the doctor is a recurring character in David's life, becoming a comfort to David as a personal reminder of his origins and also functioning as a measure of David's maturation. His greeting to David at the funeral, "Our little friends grow up around us. They grow out of our knowledge" (104), draws attention to the passage of time and to the fact that life, as much as death, is a process of change.

Omer and his family present an example to David of how to reconcile life and death. At this point in David's life, Omer may be seen as preparing David for what is to follow, both throughout his life and, more immediately, for his mother's funeral. Due to his youth and inexperience, David finds this neither instructive nor comforting: "I do not think I have ever experienced so strange a feeling in my life (I am wiser now, perhaps) as that of being with them, remembering how they had been employed, and seeing them enjoy the ride. I was not angry with them; I was more afraid of them, as if I were cast away among creatures with whom I had no community of nature" (102). That parenthetical aside, whereby David as narrator alludes to having gained a greater self-knowledge since that time, may be a self-deprecatory authorial comment or a reminder of the need to be alert to tensions within David and the text that resist resolution. As David's text will show, the passage of time before he next encounters Omer has enabled him to reconsider this first, childhood experience of death and to come to some understanding of the Omer philosophy.

Material Aspects of David's First Experience of Death

Omer's first appearance in the text initiates David into an awareness of death that he does not comprehend at the time and his education in death continues when he arrives home for the funeral. Approaching the Rookery, he is given a physical sign that it is a house in mourning: "Those solemn windows, looking blindly on me like closed eyes once bright" (102). This refers to the material aspect of death by which a house in which there had been a death had all blinds and curtains drawn. This darkening of the house was a gesture of personal respect to the dead as well as a wordless, public sign that a death had

occurred and a household was in mourning. David notes the observance of other mourning customs: for instance, that Peggotty “spoke in whispers, and walked softly, as if the dead could be disturbed. [. . .] She sat up at night still, and watched” (102; ch. 9). Keeping a vigil over the corpse was a first step in the process by which the middle- and upper-classes sought to domesticate their dead and to integrate the experience of death with life.²⁴ There was usually a delay of at least a week between the death and the burial. This enabled the body to be laid out and viewed by mourners, allowed funeral arrangements to be made, and gave time for family and other mourners to be notified and to travel to the funeral, though ideally many would have gathered during the last days. Jalland notes that the “most urgent task immediately after death was the laying-out of the body – a service usually performed in upper- and upper-middle-class families by the nurse attending the final illness or by faithful family servants” (*Victorian Family* 211). Victorian readers of *David Copperfield* would have inferred that this “first practical duty between death and burial” (*Victorian Family* 211) was undertaken by Peggotty, “[T]hat good and faithful servant” (104; ch. 9).²⁵

David is taken to view his mother and his baby brother by Peggotty before the funeral: “I think it was a day or two before, but I am conscious of confusion in my mind about that heavy time, with nothing to mark its progress” (103). David refuses to let

²⁴ Jalland notes that “[i]t must be emphasized that attitudes towards viewing the body varied according to class, as well as climate and personal taste. Edwin Chadwick’s 1843 *Report on the Practice of Interment in Towns* noted that a corpse generated feelings of respect and awe only among the comfortable classes. Among the lower orders it was often treated ‘with as little ceremony as the carcase in a butcher’s shop’, due to the familiarity and even disgust induced when bodies were retained in overcrowded living-rooms for over a week” (*Victorian Family* 213). On the same topic, Brooks observes that Chadwick’s factual narratives of lower-class deaths “suggest a macabre parody of mourning and remembrance in the affectionate family of the middling sort. In the single rooms occupied by working-class families, the dead were literally, not metaphorically, domesticated, and continuity between the living and the dead was forged not by affection but by infection” (*Mortal Remains* 35).

²⁵ Jalland refers to *Simple Instructions for the laying Out of the Dead*, by Two Queens’ Nurses that gave instructions for the laying out procedure. This involved binding parts of the body before rigor mortis set in, closing eyes, straightening limbs, and washing and dressing the body (*Victorian Family* 212).

Peggotty draw back the covers, a refusal that has serious implications for his memory and mourning of her which will be examined shortly, but which may be noted here: “I only recollect that underneath some white covering on the bed, with a beautiful cleanliness and freshness all around it, there seemed to me to lie embodied the solemn stillness that was in the house” (103).

David’s recollection of the funeral day also presents the mechanical, material aspects of death filtered through a child’s perception. In a dazed manner that recreates in his narrative the sense of numbness that he felt at the time, David remarks many of the Victorian material aspects of death: the use of the best parlour, the wine and cake, “and our black clothes” (103). He recalls being dressed for the funeral by Mr Omer, conspicuously unobtrusive for a Dickens undertaker: “As Pegotty was wont to tell me, long ago, the followers of my father to the same grave were made ready in the same room” (104). The double meaning contained in this phrase connects with the necessity of accepting the presence of death in life: the previous mourners followed David’s father to the grave as the present mourners will follow his mother – in the funeral procession; but the grave is also the final destination of all those in attendance: “[T]he earthly bourne of all such travellers” (10).

The Memorialising of Clara

There are obstacles to a successful resolution of memory and imagination with regard to Clara. These have consequences for David’s memorialising of her and complicate the inscription of her memory in his narrative. The first of these obstacles is his reluctance to view her body and that of his baby brother when taken by Peggotty to

the room where they lay: “[W]hen she would have turned the cover gently back, I cried: ‘Oh no! oh no!’ and held her hand” (103). This refusal indicates the beginning of David’s flawed memorialising of his mother. Jalland quotes John Hinton’s observation that “[v]iewing the body and taking part in the funeral emphasize beyond all doubt that the person is really dead” (*Victorian Family* 210). Drawing back the covers would reveal the mother of the later time who had betrayed David’s affections and acquiesced to Murdstone’s treatment of him. This is not the mother that David wishes to remember, this mother of “the later period” (106).

As an adult, David is aware of having felt a sense of betrayal by his mother of which he was ignorant as a child. His struggle to deal with these memories results in an unease that is discernible in his retrospective efforts to honestly convey his emotions while truthfully depicting Clara Copperfield. At the conclusion of Chapter 9, his mother dead and buried, the adult David reveals that his written memory is an edited version of his personal memory, an imaginative inscription rather than a straight transcription. In her death, and in the process of memorialising her in his text, David cancels out the mother of the “later period” and reinstates the mother of the “better time.” Admitting the sight of this mother would admit the memories of her betrayal. Instead, David embarks on a process of memorialising that is based on selective memory and denial:

From the moment of my knowing of the death of my mother, the idea of her as she had been of late had vanished from me. I remembered her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions [. . .]. It may be curious, but it is true. In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest. (106)

Jalland notes that the “memory of the deceased was central to the grieving process for Christians and unbelievers in the nineteenth century” (*Victorian Family* 284) and she refers to the psychiatrist Beverley Raphael who “has emphasized the importance of memory in the dynamics of grief, noting the mourner’s initial absorption in memories of the lost relationship” (*Victorian Family* 284). A useful account of the grieving process follows: although it is specifically concerned with the death of a spouse the observations as to the importance of a balanced memory of the dead are of relevance:

The psychological mourning process involves the review of [all] aspects of the lost relationship in order that the bonds binding the bereaved to the dead [. . .] may gradually be relinquished, freeing the emotional investment for ongoing life and further relationships. Thus the bereaved reviews, piece by piece, memories, thoughts, and feelings associated with the image of the dead partner. Sadness and other feelings relevant to each of those memories are experienced intensely as each is faced, treasured, and reluctantly put aside. The process is inevitably painful, yet must progress. (qtd. in Jalland, *Victorian Family* 284)

David refuses to review all aspects of his relationship with his mother. This distortion of his mother’s memory demonstrates a tendency to suppress and idealise which has implications for his emotional development and his relationships with others. David’s grieving process is incomplete and rooted in the past to an extent that prevents a life-affirming acceptance of death and encourages a flawed sense of self. This is evident in David’s own words: “The mother who lay in the grave, was the mother of my infancy;

the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom” (106).

David’s conscious suppression of memory prevents him from attaining an appropriate balance between memory and mourning. Consequently, the memorialising process is distorted and prevented from fulfilling its beneficial and healing functions. As Jalland observes in her chapter “The Consolations of Memory: the Role of Memory in the Grieving Process,” the mourning process initially involves a review of all aspects of the lost relationship: “In the first stages of this review the mourner idealizes the deceased as a perfect man or woman, but in time he or she is usually remembered in more realistic terms, as the negative qualities also surface and are accepted. Prolonged idealization and distortion of the memory are often caused by ambivalent feelings [. . .] which interfere with the successful resolution of the mourning process” (*Victorian Family* 284). David’s memory is steadfastly fixed on an image of Clara as the perfect mother whereas the inscription of this memory constructs an alternative image for the reader, if not for David. Thus, the inscription of Clara “is so obviously a retrospective construction by the adult narrator [which] points to the symbolic reworking necessary to transform woman into the idealized mother” (Poovey 91). This contradiction between David’s memories and their textual reproduction renders *David Copperfield* an ambiguous work and casts suspicion on the reliability of David’s inscribed memory.²⁶ Gilmour argues that David Copperfield has

the capacity to partition off his deepest responses and experiences in a area
of his being where they remain inaccessible to, or at least unaffected by,

²⁶ There are allusions to the memories David cannot face throughout his narrative, some of which are slight asides, almost. One example is David’s recognition of “Mr. Quinion, whom I had gone over to Lowestoft with Mr. Murdstone to see, before – it is no matter – I need not recall when” (122; ch. 10).

the larger processes of thought by which he attempts to account for the past. David's mother has an imaginative existence for him in a 'changeless Past', beyond the reach of time and outside the interpretative scope of his history: this pattern is repeated at significant stages throughout the novel [. . .] and it has far-reaching implications for our understanding of his character and emotional growth. ("Memory" 34)

The complexity of David's memory partly results from the fact that Clara's betrayal of him does not end with her death and is not restricted to a betrayal of his affections and their family life. As Poovey observes, Clara's marriage to Murdstone sees David deprived of his birthright and initiates the degrading experience that threatens the genteel identity of young Master Copperfield of Blunderstone Rookery: being sent to work as "a little labouring hind" (125; ch. 11) in the Murdstone and Grinby warehouse.²⁷ Poovey remarks that "Clara Copperfield is indirectly to blame for David's being sent to the bottling warehouse, that degradation that momentarily threatens to "blight [his] . . . career, and ruin his prospects" (99). Clara thus poses an additional problem for David and for the reliability of his text because his retrospective inscription of her memory is affected by the consequences of her betrayal after her death as much as before it. It is therefore significant for David's development and for the authority of his memoir that his text casts doubts on his memorialising success. He attempts to reconcile the tension between his memory of his mother and his inscription of her in the text by memorialising her as an ideal. David takes advantage of memorialising techniques and authorial privilege in the textual construction of his life to preserve the "mist of fancy" around

²⁷ The relationship of this episode in *David Copperfield* to Dickens' autobiographical fragment is discussed in the final chapter, 121-24.

Clara. It is David, not Clara, who cancels “all the rest” (106) rather than lose “the young mother of [his] earlier impressions” (106).

The memorialised ideal of his mother that David inscribes in his memoirs affects the interpretation of his other memories and of his “life,” particularly when the narrative reveals memories and invites interpretations that David apparently attempts to conceal. David seeks to control his memories by putting them into writing, shaping them a certain way and thus shaping himself, too. However, David’s cancellations and denials are an indelible part of him and his life. They form an undercurrent of suppressed memory in *David Copperfield* that the writing/memorialising process does not efface. The memories that David “cancels” from his life are those of others’ betrayal of him. These betrayals effectively threaten his sense of security, question his judgement, and assault his identity. They follow a similar pattern in that death – either physical or figurative – is the betrayer’s fate. The first betrayal that David experiences is his mother’s remarriage, and hers is his first experience of death.

David’s exposure to the world of work is a consequence of Clara’s poorly-judged second marriage. Murdstone’s decision to send David away constitutes an abrogation of his personal duty to David and represents a violation of the ideal relationship between the dead and the living. In this final exile that Murdstone imposes on him, David is prevented from being able to sustain a connection with his dead parents. He is removed from them and the place most suitable for memorialising them, as he and his mother had remembered his father “in the better time” (102). The extreme isolation of the orphaned David is conjured up by the adult narrator in the image of the “lone lorn child” wearing “a much-worn little white hat, with a black crape round it for my mother” (124; ch. 10)

looking back from the post-chaise: “See, how out house and church are lessening in the distance; how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects” (124).

More than a physical description of leaving, this departure from Blunderstone marks the end of David’s childhood and the beginning of another experience that he blots out retrospectively. A consequence of this suppression of memory is that when the warehouse memory surfaces it has not been softened by time and the images and aspects of this experience “are all before [David], just as they were in the evil hour when [he] went among them for the first time” (125). At the outset of chapter 11 David writes that “[n]o words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this low companionship [. . .] and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom” (126). Notwithstanding this disclaimer, David devotes the rest of the chapter to narrating the misery and shame he felt in this position. Even in his written life, it is important for David to remind himself (and his readers) of the middle-class respectability that is the basis for his identity: “Yet I held some station at Murdstone and Grinby’s, too” (131). David reiterates that how much he suffered is “utterly beyond [his] power to tell” (131) then persists in the effort to articulate this. His words reveal that the suffering is caused by the contaminating effects of the world of manual labour and low companionship. Although one of his epithets is “the little gent” the others lack even this slight acknowledgement of David’s class difference which he wishes to retain: “Though perfectly familiar with [the other workers], my conduct and manner were different enough from theirs to place a space between us” (131). Although David is at pains to prevent traces of class snobbery from entering his self-construction, his narrative reveals that this space was considered necessary for the preservation of David’s fragile

identity.²⁸ Again in the chapter he distinguishes himself from his surroundings and co-workers: “All this time I was working at Murdstone’s and Grinby’s in the same common way, and with the same common companions, and with the same ceaseless sense of unmerited degradation as at first. But I never, happily for me no doubt, made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, and in prowling around the streets at meal-times” (135).

When adoption by his aunt restores to David the opportunity of becoming learned and distinguished, the experiences that had threatened this are conspicuously concealed: “[A] remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life – which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance [. . .] and a curtain had for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby’s. [. . .] I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand” (175; ch. 14). David makes the admission that the “remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage to examine how long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it” (175). Like Podsnap’s ineffective gesture to dismiss unpleasant realities in *Our Mutual Friend*, David may claim to have dismissed this memory in writing, hoping that he has successfully written it out of his life, but again his own words reveal that memory resists such an artificial reconstruction: “When I tread the old ground, I do not wonder that I seem to see and pity, going on before me, an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and

²⁸ Just as it is David, not Clara, who cancels the unpleasant memories, his text reveals that the distance is of David’s making and that it is not displeasing to him.

sordid things” (137; ch. 11). Respectable once more, David returns to Yarmouth – a trip that marks several aspects of his development.

David’s Second Encounter with Omer (Ch. 21): the Young Gentleman Returns

Having been sent away from Yarmouth, newly orphaned, to undergo the humiliating and painful warehouse apprenticeship, David returns as a young gentleman, unrecognisable even to Peggotty. Significantly, the first person that David seeks out is Omer. This second encounter with the undertaker reveals the extent of David’s personal development as he now understands a little of the Omer philosophy. It is appropriate that the only thing that seems to have changed in the town is the sign above Omer’s shop: “Omer and Joram was now written up, where Omer used to be; but the inscription, Draper, Tailor, Haberdasher, Funeral Furnisher, Etc., remained as it was” (247). The sign still signals that the business is part of the business of life, and the changes to Omer’s business reflect the lesson to be realised by David: that death remains a constant presence but that life goes on regardless. David has no difficulty in recognising Minnie or her children, but neither she nor Omer recognise David. Omer greets him with a deferential “[s]ervant, sir [. . .]. What can I do for you, sir?” (247; ch.21) that acknowledges the difference between these working people and this gentleman. But now that David’s respectability is assured, by his circumstances if not his memory, he does not stand on class distinctions and demonstrates an easy familiarity that aligns him with his gentlemanly idol, Steerforth.

David obliquely refers to his mother’s death in order to make a connection with Omer, much as Omer had done with David in their first encounter. Omer responds by

recalling that memory in even greater detail: “There were two parties. The little party was laid along with the other party” (247). David’s childhood observations of Omer and his family have been re-examined by David, with an insight gained by age. He judges, based on those memories, that Minnie has become Mrs Joram but the comment that most testifies to some emotional development on David’s part is his thanks to Omer for that earlier kindness: “[Y]ou were very good-natured to me once, when I am afraid that I didn’t show that I thought so” (247). The “rat tat tat” of the coffin under construction no longer has the same unknown yet disturbing effect that it did when he heard his mother’s coffin being made: instead, he notes it as “the tune that never does leave off” (250). Omer remains a vital illustration of the life and death relationship, telling David that the day of his mother’s funeral was the day that the date was set for Minnie and Joram’s wedding. (248). He continues to advocate that one should “take [life] as it comes, and make the most of it” (248-49).

Omer also introduces the subject of the chapter, little Em’ly, and imparts enough details of her progress and character to raise doubts about her which David refuses to entertain. This second meeting with Omer may show that David has learnt some life lessons but he is still blind in many respects, particularly in his assessment of people and the forming of inappropriate attachments, such as his friendship with Steerforth. David’s reluctance to face both retrospective and prospective unpleasantness results in a flawed judgement of people that recalls his mother. When he peeps at Emily, David acknowledges her wilfulness and capriciousness but readily elects to see “nothing in her pretty looks, I am sure, but what was meant for goodness and happiness, and what was on a good and happy course” (249). Minnie shows more perception and foresight when she

observes of Emily that “she should have kept to her own station in life” (248; ch. 21).

This observation emphasises the difference in David’s perception of Emily, one which reflects the distorting effect of his unbalanced memorialising. Poovey compares Emily with Clara, arguing that Emily

poses another, more indirect threat to the identity of the hero – a threat that will ultimately prove resistant even to such elaborate narrative treatment [as Clara received]. Specifically, the possibility that David’s childhood infatuation with Emily might mature into love introduces into the rhetoric of affection the specter of class. Class difference exists as a threat in *David Copperfield* because “innocence” in this novel entails not only sexual ignorance, but also the indifference to class distinctions that enables David to befriend and bring together “chuckle-headed” Ham Pegotty and the well-born Steerforth. (98)

Poovey is persuasive in arguing that “such indifference to class is as crucial to David’s heroism as is his boyish ‘freshness’” (98). It is this indifference that enabled David to dispense with the social space between Omer and him, but David’s judgement is flawed – a symptom of his over-zealous idealisation that he hopes will protect him from the unpleasant realities of life, such as death and people who betray him.

David is similarly blinded to the destructive and dangerous qualities in Steerforth. He confesses in retrospect that, had anyone tried to alert him then to Steerforth’s true nature, David would have received “such a lie” with probably “an increase [. . .] of the romantic feelings of fidelity and friendship” (253; ch. 21) that he felt when he took Steerforth to meet Emily for the first time. David’s memorialising of Steerforth follows

the process of denial and selectivity that occurred with Clara. He memorialises each of them with an imaginative reconstruction that depends upon the rejection or marginalisation of memory. Some of these memories would threaten David's constructed "innocence" and the propriety of his "life." It is this refusal to draw back the cover of idealisation, just as he had refused to draw back the cover from his mother's corpse, that enables David to believe that Steerforth is jesting when he says in reference to the Peggottys that there is a "pretty wide separation between them and us" (240; ch. 20), and which causes David to repeat, in jest likewise, Steerforth's description of them as "that sort of people" (246; ch. 21).

During their stay in Yarmouth, David haunts the old spots:

[A]s my memory had often done, and lingered among them as my younger thoughts had lingered when I was far away. The grave beneath the tree, where both my parents lay [. . .] the grave which Peggotty's own faithful care had ever since kept neat, and made a garden of, I walked near by the hour. [. . .] I could read the names upon the stone as I walked to and fro [...]. My reflections at these times were always associated with the figure I was to make in life, and the distinguished things I was to do. My echoing footsteps went to no other tune, but were as constant to that as if I had come home to build my castles in the air at a living mother's side. (260-61; ch. 22)

By means of these conventional Victorian churchyard reveries, David is finally able to recreate the ideal relationship with the dead members of his family that Murdstone had invaded. His mother is more important in his day dreams of future success than his father,

who only ever had a real presence in death. David has actual memories of his mother, even if these have been censored and imaginatively shaped – constructed into a “memory” of an ideal past. There is also a suggestion that only in death can ideal relationships be realised, and that a family buried together attains a perfect state of existence that is inviolable; that the end of personal memories ensures that only the memorialised remains. Furthermore, David’s imaginative constructions of his future self in the ideal memorialising environment of a graveyard have implications for the imaginative construction of himself in the book of his life, a commemorative object by which he self-memorialises.

David’s Third Encounter with Omer (Ch. 30): Adult Experience of Death and Betrayal

Having introduced Steerforth to the Pegotty family and having set in motion the events that will lead to Emily’s elopement, David returns to Yarmouth in Chapter 30 to see the dying Barkis and to witness Steerforth’s betrayal of their friendship and of the Peggotty’s hospitality. There are a number of losses in this chapter and it marks David’s third encounter with Omer. David immediately seeks him out on the night he arrives in the town. This eagerness to communicate with Omer indicates how important he has become to David, this man who has buried both his parents. With the passage of time it seems that David might have learned something about the relationship of life and death as he has grown older. He refers to “that great Visitor, before whose presence all the living must give place” (356) but there are still gaps in David’s knowledge and experience of death. When he enters the shop the “old tune” raises apprehensions in him and he is

unaware of the delicacy of an undertaker's position with regard to the ill and dying. Omer regrets that the suspicion that others might have of an undertaker's vested interest prevents him from asking people how they are. "It's one of the things that cut the trade off from attentions they could often wish to show" (357) he says, going on to make the observation that "[s]ome good and some bad goes, no doubt, to all callings. What I wish, is, that parties were brought up stronger-minded" (357). Omer thus shows that he is aware that people view undertakers with suspicion, as being concerned only with the financial rewards of dealing in death – a subject about which Dickens felt strongly but that does not serve his purpose in this novel. Rather, Omer takes the view that the sensitivity arises because people in general do not have the acceptance of death that makes life more pleasant and the fact of death more bearable.

This episode also picks up the connection between death and betrayal that is present in the memorialising of Clara and applies it to Emily. Omer connects Barkis' imminent death with Emily by saying that "we're obleeged, in ascertaining how Barkis goes on, to limit ourselves to Em'ly" (357). Omer informs David that Emily has been unsettled recently, but everyone wrongly ascribes this to the approaching death. Indeed, Emily's elopement with Steerforth constitutes a death for her. She betrays her family and "dies" a social death. The death/betrayal connection is reinforced as David significantly moves from Emily to an inquiry about Martha. Omer's reply is applicable to Emily also: "I never thought there was harm in the girl. [. . .] None of us ever did" (359). Emily's betrayal is all the more serious because she has allowed her family to interpret her behaviour as caused by tenderness rather than guilt. When David remarks the change in her demeanour Dan says fondly that her heart is so loving that she feels such things

keenly: “It’s nat’ral in young folk [. . .] when they’re new to these here trials, and timid” (360). Seduced by Steerforth’s claim to gentility by birth, Emily rejects the gentlemanly nature of Ham. David observes of Ham’s treatment of Emily that “I never saw him approach her, but I felt that nature had given him the soul of a gentleman” (360-63). This contrasts with the insensitivity with which Steerforth treats people, David included, as mere amusements. For example, he makes the “unexpected and cold reply” that Ham is “rather a chuckle-headed fellow” for Emily (258; ch. 21), a comment that David in his blind admiration of Steerforth chooses to dismiss as a joke. David’s reticence as to his youthful feelings for Emily indicates that he has grown into an awareness of the social difference between them that makes him recall his love for her as a “lingering fancy” (257). The betrayal by these two of David is made worse by its occurring so soon after the actual death that he came to witness and mourn.

Barkis’ funeral is described as a simple and appropriate affair. It is testimony to Peggotty’s loyalty and a sign of her respectability, that she “had long ago bought, out of her own savings, a little piece of ground in our old churchyard near the grave of her ‘own sweet girl,’ [. . .] and there they were to rest” (364; ch. 31).²⁹ This comment also testifies to the importance for the Victorians to be with their nearest and dearest in death as well as in life. As Brooks explains, this is part of the domestication of the dead and the growing significance of the self-contained and private family unit that particularly

²⁹ The most proximate indication of the size and cost of such a plot is offered by Brooks. Although his foremost concern is Victorian private and public cemeteries, the costs give a general indication of the price of interment. Giving the example of 15 guineas for a grave 9ft by 9ft by 4ft 6in. for a plot in the best of the reserved section of a public cemetery he continues: “[T]here were graduated charges for small and less well-positioned sites down to a class 3 grave, the cheapest in the reserve sections, which was £2 10s. [. . .] Burial without an inscription or memorial, but including all fees apart from that to the minister, could be had for 9s 6d for an adult [. . .]. These were working-class prices” (*Mortal Remains* 49-50).

characterised middle-class sensibilities, and which became the popular commemorative ideal throughout all classes. Peggotty's adherence to this ideal indicates her moral worth.

Barkis' funeral is the second personal death that David experiences but his first as an adult. He has formed an opinion of Victorian funerals that corresponds with Dickens' but which he expresses in a few, restrained words: "I did not attend the funeral in character. I mean I was not dressed up in a black cloak and a streamer, to frighten the birds" (365; ch. 31). Nor does he accompany the funeral procession; indeed, it is comprised only of Peggotty and Dan. The only other people in attendance are Mr Chillip, his baby and her nurse, the clergyman, the "mad gentleman" who looks out of David's little window (365), and Omer, who "breathed short in the background" (366). Mr Chillip's presence at this funeral, too, reinforces the text's message that life and death are not isolated states of being. The simplicity of these funeral arrangements, the rural setting and the plain yet feeling manner with which David describes the scene, make this an example of the ideal burial. The importance of a churchyard as a site for memorialising the dead and facilitating the continuance of the family circle is indicated by David's comment that "[w]e walked about the churchyard for an hour, after all was over; and pulled some young leaves from the tree above my mother's grave" (366).

This reference to his dead mother revives the link between betrayal and death that she represents. Barkis' decline and death means the deferral of Emily's wedding, a deferral that enables Steerforth to increase his power over her. Their elopement disrupts the sense of completion and of duty fulfilled that was created by the funeral. David evokes the betrayal in language that connects the deception with death. Indeed, a statement of reluctance to record what happens next immediately follows the reference to

his mother's grave: "A dread falls upon me here. A cloud is lowering on the distant town [. . .]. I fear to approach it" (366). He reads out Emily's letter in "the midst of the silence of death" (369). Although the act of writing cannot expunge these events, David performs an act of creative censorship similar to that with which he remembers his mother. He holds dear the memory of his affection for Steerforth, but says that his remembrances "were as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead" (372; ch. 32). This memorialising of Steerforth enables David to avoid confronting his own lack of judgement and his insistent representation of Steerforth to the Peggottys as the ideal gentleman, even as he recognises Ham as "the soul of a gentleman." This avoidance may be detected in David's own words: "The impulse that had been upon me to go down upon my knees, and ask their pardon for the desolation I had caused, and curse Steerforth, yielded to a better feeling. My overcharged heart found the same relief, and I cried too" (371). At the least, this is a more comfortable feeling for David, but it enables him to refrain from examining his own part in the elopement too closely and to preserve an idealised memory of Steerforth.

David's Final Encounter with Omer (Ch. 51): Death in the Midst of Life

David does not communicate with Steerforth or Emily again, and they only re-enter his life again to leave it, finally: Emily to emigrate to Australia, and Steerforth to drown in the storm, with Ham. As David approaches this episode Omer makes his last appearance. He is older and confined to a chair, but finds as much to enjoy in life as ever: "[A] man must take the fat with the lean; that's what he must make up his mind to do in this life" (599; ch.51). Omer is again a measure of time's march to the tune that never

ceases, recalling his first involvement with David: “[D]ear me, it’s a long time ago, now, an’t it? [. . .]. With a pretty little party laid long with the other party. And you quite a small party then, yourself” (600). He opines another piece of Omer philosophy: “[W]e are all drawing on to the bottom of the hill, whatever age we are [. . .]. So let us always do a kindness, and be over-rejoiced” (600). David will need to develop a similar acceptance of the “two ends of life” (600) in order to live at ease with the bereavements he is about to suffer. Dora’s death marks the beginning of a series of deaths that David experiences towards the end of his “life” but his mourning of her is interrupted by other events.

The first of these concerns his aunt whom David accompanies to her estranged husband’s funeral. Betsey gives him a simple funeral: there is a “plain hearse” to carry the “plain coffin” to a corner of the churchyard at Hornsey: “Better here than in the streets,” said my aunt. “He was born here” (640; ch. 54). She reveals that this funeral marks the thirty-sixth anniversary of her wedding, a coincidence that illustrates the often hidden connections between life’s significant events. Betsey’s generosity in providing her husband with a funeral supposedly spares him from being disposed of by the hospital. If she had not intervened, it is probable that he would have been given a pauper’s funeral, with all the stigma and loss of identity that this denoted. Betsey accepts responsibility for fulfilling the material aspects of death, and all that signifies, for her husband. He had betrayed her as Clara and Steerforth have betrayed David, and while he was alive he was a source of irritation, but, by his death, her memory of him is softened: “He was a fine-looking man when I married him [. . .] and he was sadly changed” (640; ch. 54). She briefly acknowledges her grief and acknowledges the person that he had become. The death of this spouse and Betsey’s response provide a lesson to David who must grieve for

the death of Dora. Betsey made an error in judgement in her marriage, as David did in his to Dora, that has shaped her character since and influenced her relationships with others. This funeral indicates the need to forgive oneself and others for past mistakes, and the importance of fulfilling one's duty to the dead by paying the proper respects. David is being exposed to ways of mourning in order that he may learn to mourn properly, either by example or by realising that there are inauspicious ways of mourning, but doubts remain as to whether David does respond to these life lessons of death in an appropriate way.

This funeral is closely followed by the deaths of Steerforth and Ham, both of whose bodies are recovered from the sea. David accepts responsibility for bringing Steerforth's body to his mother: "I knew that the care of it, and the hard duty of preparing his mother to receive it, could only rest with me; and I was anxious to discharge that duty as faithfully as I might" (650). Mrs Steerforth notes David's mourning dress and expresses a hope that time will bring relief, a conventional platitude that is ironic given the unrelenting grief to which she will cling. David initially shows skill and delicacy in using her sympathy to prepare her for his news: "I hope Time [. . .] will be good to all of us. [. . .] we must all trust to that in our heaviest misfortunes" (652). Death is implied by the euphemistic use of illness, as Mrs Creakle had attempted to prepare David for his mother's death. But David is unable to speak aloud the fact of Steerforth's death because he is unable to answer his mother's question, as to whether they were reconciled: "I could not say Yes, I could not say No. [. . .] I said by the motion of my lips, to Rosa, "Dead!" (652). David's inability to acknowledge the sense of betrayal he feels thus affects his ability to properly discharge his duty.

David returns later in the day with the body and sees it laid in Mrs. Steerforth's room. He undertakes to darken the windows, darkening last those in the room where the body is. He thus observes the rituals associated with mourning, the implication being that the rituals are an important part of coming to accept loss. David is able to see and touch the dead Steerforth, acts that he was unable to perform when his mother died, and which are important for accepting the death. David is able to perform these material aspects of death now not because he has a greater, more balanced knowledge of life and death, but because his method of dealing with Steerforth's betrayal has been to remember him as "a cherished friend, who was dead" (372; ch. 32). In effect, David reverses the mourning process: he imagines Steerforth dead and memorialises him long before he has occasion to perform the functional tasks associated with his death. As Gilmour argues:

There is no real awakening for David's undisciplined heart in relation to Steerforth, because the nature of his response [to Steerforth's betrayal, at the beginning of Chapter 32] precludes that possibility. The telling phrase is 'I should have held in so much tenderness the memory of my affection for him . . .' [372]: what we are witnessing here is a process of imaginative reversion similar in kind to that already noted in the case of David's mother, where death cancels the recognition of change in her character.

Betrayal becomes, significantly, as a kind of death." ("Memory" 39)

David is able to view and touch Steerforth because this is Steerforth as David has memorialised him since his betrayal of David's trust and affection: "I thought more of all that was brilliant in him, I softened more towards all that was good in him" (372). In memorialising Steerforth as figuratively dead in order to preserve his ideal memory of

him, David is able to view his body because it conforms to rather than undermines the nature of the relationship that David has had time to imaginatively construct.³⁰

David's narrative presents Mrs. Steerforth as an example of the life-denying danger of excessive grief to which Mr. Wickfield had also fallen victim. Agnes' father acknowledges that

weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance and indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother turned to disease [. . .]. I thought it possible that I could truly love one creature in the world, and not love the rest; I thought it possible that I could truly mourn for one creature in the world, and not have some part in the grief of all who mourned. Thus the lessons of my life have been perverted!" (471; ch. 34)

Mrs Steerforth has followed the same path as Mr Wickfield. She clings to her memory of Steerforth and in David's "Last Retrospect" she is shown trapped in the moment of her loss, still seeing David in mourning as he was when he brought her the news and repeating the words she used then (715; ch. 64).

After the series of betrayals and bereavements that he has suffered, David leaves England "not knowing, even then, how great the shock was, that I had to bear" (663; ch. 58). A young widower, as his mother had been a young widow, the material aspects of Dora's death are conspicuously absent from David's narrative. Her death is not witnessed by David for whom the likeness between Dora and Clara has threatened the idealised memory that David had constructed of his mother. The chapter ends with David's words

³⁰ David was unable to view his mother because his memorialising of her was new and he was thus more vulnerable to the reminder of her betrayal.

that “for a time, all things are blotted out of my remembrance” (628; ch. 53). Only when he is abroad does he become aware of “all that I had lost – love, friendship, interest; all of that had been shattered – my first trust, my first affection” (664; ch. 58). This consciousness of the extent of his loss is followed by David’s grief: “I mourned for my child-wife [. . .] for him who might have won the love and admiration of thousands [. . .] for the broken heart that had found rest in the stormy sea; and for the wandering remnants of the simple home, where I had heard the night-wind blowing, when I was a child” (664). David’s text thus claims for him that he allowed himself to grieve and mourn but the weight of his words already inscribed is not so easily balanced by this late pronouncement of recognition and acceptance. Indeed, David’s “brooding sorrow” (664) is not lessened by his own natural progression through the stages of grief to mourning, but by the intervention of “great Nature” (665). This, rather than the interaction of memory and mourning, exerts “some softening influence” (665) on David whose grief for all that he has lost soon becomes grief for the loss of Agnes’ love.

Following the pattern that has been established throughout the text, fancy comes to David’s aid as the tool he needs in order to mourn and he performs the most imaginative act of memorialising in the face of death, inscribing a story “growing, not remotely, out of my experience” (666). This consciously reconstructed work of memory shaped and edited into another form restores David to his role as writer of fiction and he starts, “[I]n my old ardent way, on a new fancy [. . .] my third work of fiction” (666-67). With writing so inextricably a part of David’s mourning process, any division between personal memory and fiction is blurred: for David, everything can be a “written story.” The life lesson that David’s experiences of death and betrayal has taught him is how to

make “a net of a number of these pieces” (17; ch. 2); to edit observations and to spin a “web” (708; ch. 63); and to offer a “written story” (714; ch. 64) as his “written memory” (667; ch. 58).

David’s Written Story

David’s concluding chapters seem to confirm his acquisition of that ideal balance of remembrance and forgetfulness necessary for a successful and comfortable life (in the Omer sense): reconciled to the past, comfortable with the present, accepting and unafraid of the future. Lest there be any doubt, David explicitly proclaims his happiness and success: “I had advanced in fame and fortune, my domestic joy was perfect” (708; ch. 63). But David’s very life-text betrays him: what he has “purposed to record” is made ambiguous and unstable by the presence of memories and meanings that he did not “purpose to record” but which have resisted effacement. David’s life has been a series of experiences of death that should have made him wary of perverting the lessons of his life, but the keen powers of observation which aid him in his personal and professional writing have not opened his eyes to the dangers of an over-edited memory. At the end of his written life, David is no longer in mourning: instead, he would have the text indicate that his domestic happiness and professional success are due in great part to his ability to mourn the dead appropriately and to integrate his experiences of death with his life. But David does not so much mourn the past as re-live and imaginatively recreate it.

Thus, what David offers in his memoir is the “tender fiction” of his life, as remembered, edited, and imaginatively interpreted by him. David himself refers to his text as memory and story. David’s story is the book of his remembrance – it preserves his

store of memory and will preserve the memory of him. *David Copperfield* is David Copperfield's "life in manuscript," a monumental work of self-commemoration which demonstrates the relationship between the writing of fiction and the writing of an epitaph. Indeed, David reveals that he is able to perform both these modes of inscription when he takes Dan to Yarmouth "to see a little tablet I had put up in the churchyard" (714; ch. 63) to Ham's memory. David copies the "plain inscription," which is not given in the text, for Dan while Dan gathers "a tuft of grass from the grave, and a little earth" (714) for Emily. This reference to the production and reproduction of an inscription commemorating a person's memory comes immediately before David's "Last Retrospect" which opens "[a]nd now my written story ends" (714). Set in paper, not in stone, David's memorial testifies to the complex interaction of memory and imagination in the memorialising process. It becomes David's attempt to control and shape his personal memory for public contemplation, his effort to present an already memorialised self for posthumous commemoration. Given the connection between death and betrayal that has characterised David's story, as his "life" concludes we are invited to consider of whom it is a betrayal, if not himself. This anticipates the recognition of memory's dual nature, its vulnerability and duplicity, which is the impulse behind Dickens' own memorialising instructions, to be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3: GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In the last pages of *David Copperfield*, as David's "life" draws to an end, he is revealed to have created an epitaph, a public memorial of personal mourning and memory. This implies that David has mastered the material aspects of death although the memorial he has created to his own memory suggests a failure to memorialise successfully. Beginning where the earlier novel left off, *Great Expectations* opens with an epitaph, read, not written, by the hero at the very outset of his story. Unlike David's epitaph (for Ham, for himself) over which David has control of invention, inscription, and re-inscription for distribution and which suggests that David has some confidence in his sense of self and in his ability, Pip's first encounter with tombstones simultaneously affirms and challenges his identity. His story begins with an awareness of individual mortality that David takes a "life" to learn. In *David Copperfield*, the writing/inscribing aspect of memorialising comments upon the hero's progress by revealing that threats to his sense of integrated self are marginalised by his unbalanced editing of personal memory. In *Great Expectations*, the reading/interpreting aspect of memorialising demonstrates the effects of the hero's rejection of personal memory in his attempt to construct a new social self.

Aspects of death throughout *Great Expectations*, such as epitaphs, churchyards, funerals, and elegiac allusions, provide a commentary upon Pip's development, connecting his life as a gentleman with his graveyard experiences and with his encounter with the man who is the link between gentility and crime. The inherent instability and multiplicity of language/inscription is affected by inappropriate remembering, an issue

more consciously explored in Dickens' later novel than in *David Copperfield*, where the writer ostensibly wields power over language. By comparison, from the very outset *Great Expectations* is a text concerned with the inscription and interpretative aspects of memorialising. Its exploration of class and such shifting concepts as gentlemanliness and respectability indicate that Dickens was re-visiting, re-presenting and re-interpreting some of the guiding principles and deep-seated anxieties of his own life, of which the first major expression occurred in *David Copperfield*. As with *David Copperfield*, the relationship between Dickens and *Great Expectations* will be discussed in the final chapter (129-34).

The opening paragraphs of *Great Expectations* forge connections between death, inscription, interpretation and personal identity that are sustained throughout the work.³¹ This part of the text involves an intricate layering of memory and inscription upon memory and inscription: the older Pip records for the reader the recollection of a childhood memory of the young Pip – the remembrance of his family's tombstones and the memory of his creative interpretation of them from the very inscriptions that are written in memory of them. Pip is creating character from characters much as a reader of a novel would.³² Sadrin argues that "Pip's self-christening, in the surname of the father and in the first name of the son, is at once an act of bondage and a gesture of autonomy" (95). Brooks expresses a similar view: "This originating moment of Pip's narration and

³¹ Peter Brooks observes that the opening scene "is richly suggestive of the problem of identity, self-consciousness, naming and language that will accompany Pip throughout the novel, and points to the original decentering of the subject in regard to himself" (116-17).

³² Baumgarten comments that "[p]art of our pleasure in reading *Great Expectations* comes from watching Pip learn to read and write. [. . .] In this book, he serves as the hero of mis-reading. Participating with this heroic reader in the effort to become literate, we are yet separate from him. [. . .] Unlike the printed text of the novel that absorbs us, the material which the young Pip reads [the epitaph] is handwritten" (61). This is an interesting re-working of the handwritten copy of an epitaph by David Copperfield, the hero of "mis-writing."

his narrative is a self-naming that already subverts whatever authority could be found in the text of the tombstones” (*Reading* 115). Having indicated in only a few lines (of text/epitaph) the importance of Pip’s name, his narrative reveals how the creative process can distort or usurp reality. When Pip says of his parents that “my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones” (35) this is more than an endearing example of Pip’s imagination. It signals the difficulty of memorialising successfully without personal memory. Furthermore, this combination of “unreasonable fancy,” absence of memory and renunciation of origins foreshadows a challenge to Pip’s new-born self, a challenge initiated when that fragile self acquires genteel aspirations after its exposure to Satis House.

An Inscribed Epitaph

It is appropriate that a novel so concerned with memory and inscription should open with an epitaph, the first of many throughout the text. The narrator also uses the epitaph to allude to the other aspect of the novel under consideration: what one does for a living, one’s occupation, or position; in other words, one’s social situation. Dickens deftly introduces this crucial element of *Great Expectations* when he has Pip say, in a humorous, ironic way, that the lozenges “were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine – who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle” (35; ch. 1).³³ The inference is that Pip will not give up trying to get a living; indeed, his struggle will be to learn *how* to live.

³³ Pip’s fanciful description of his brother’s tombstones echoes the coffins which terrify Oliver Twist when he becomes a child mute for the parochial undertaker, Sowerberry. Along the shop wall “were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut into the same shape: looking in the dim light, like high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches-pockets” (75). A similar image is given in the account

Dickens powerfully intimates the importance of the past on Pip by introducing him to us (and to himself) in a place dedicated to the remembrance of the past. Although an orphan, indeed, doubly the posthumous child that David Copperfield was, Pip owes his being to “Philip Pirrip” and “Also Georgiana”: he owes his existence to that which is deceased, a compelling image of the present being dependent on the past. Pip’s family name is authorised by its inscription on his father’s tombstone, and it is worth noting that Pip’s “proper” name is identical to his father’s, thus preparing for the way that Pip the gentleman may also be said to be “late of this parish” (35) when he tries to bury his past and the memory of his origins. As Manlove states, Pip’s “first impression of life is of death, and of the fact that these tombstones mark the relics of his family. Philip Pirrip, his namesake, is beneath the ground. [. . .] His realization of the being of things is realization of extinction of being” (62). Even at this stage of his development Pip disregards the past as he rejects his father’s name in the establishment of his own identity.³⁴ The complexity of Pip’s emerging sense of identity is compounded by his first becoming aware of himself in a place where he can literally be read as dead: that is to say, calling himself “Pip” does not nullify the fact that he is “Philip Pirrip” and that there is a tombstone inscribed with his name commemorating this. Having surveyed the memorials to the parents and siblings of whom he has no personal memory, Pip inscribes his first memory for the reader: “My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for

of Young Jerry Cruncher fleeing from the sight of his father moonlighting as a resurrection man: “He had a strong idea that the coffin he had seen was running after him; and, pictured as hopping on behind him, bolt upright upon its narrow end [. . .] like a dropsical boy’s-Kite without tail and wings” (*A Tale of Two Cities* 168).

³⁴ Max Byrd makes a similar observation in his exploration of Pip’s moral growth in relation to his literal education.

certain [. . .] that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip” (35-6; ch.1). Pip’s simultaneous birth into awareness of self and of mortality amounts to a conception and inception of self amongst the dead and buried. Consequently, the discovery of a sense of self is a traumatic and lonely experience for Pip, occurring as it does at a bleak time and place, where everything and everyone is “dead and buried” (35).

Pip and Magwitch: the First Memory

The opening chapter establishes the pivot upon which the story is to turn, which is the connection between Pip and Magwitch. This churchyard episode also contains much that will be repeated throughout the rest of the novel which looks back to the opening chapter with its connection between death, identity and memory. The terror Pip feels upon attaining an awareness of himself as an individual is heightened by the appearance of Magwitch, the first person to whom Pip presents his newly-discovered self. Magwitch compels Pip to confirm his identity, commanding him to repeat his name and to “Give it mouth!” (36). This, followed by his instruction for Pip to point out where he lives, may be seen as Magwitch affirming Pip’s identity and presence in the world. The appearance of Magwitch in such circumstances and surroundings is a physical prefiguring of the later revelation that the man who has “started up from among the graves” (36) is Pip’s “second father” (337; ch. 39).³⁵ The text provides further evidence, implicit and then explicit, that

³⁵ This is another element common to *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*: “Both David and Pip are fascinated by the tombstones of their fathers (which are among the first things mentioned in both books), as if they contained some partly legible meaning for their lives. For both children the awakening of self-consciousness is associated with the advent of a man of threatening aspect who appears ‘like Lazarus raised from the dead’ in *Copperfield* and ‘like a pirate come to life’ in *Great Expectations*. And they appear in the immediate vicinity of the fathers’ graves” (Westburg 124).

this is the case. When Pip receives notice of his expectations, the first condition is that he “always bear the name of Pip” (165). In stipulating this, Magwitch names Pip at the moment of his deliverance from his old identity to his new one of gentleman.

Magwitch not only bears witness to Pip’s new-born identity: he gives Pip his first experience of the fragility of identity and its susceptibility to uncertainty and confusion. Turning Pip upside-down represents the upheaval of Pip’s world that his later reappearance causes. Pip, placed on “a high tombstone” (36), is at a manifest disadvantage: Magwitch is “sudden and strong” while he is “undersized for [his] years, and not strong” (36). Although this position is to prevent Pip’s escape, it also puts him on a more equal physical footing with Magwitch: in effect, the tombstone makes them equal. Death was widely idealised by the Victorians as the great leveller of social distinctions, so the lifting of Pip to a tombstone by the man who will raise Pip from (death as a) rural apprentice to (life as a) London gentleman is rich in meaning and allusion. As Pip will discover, his identity as a gentleman also had its conception and inception in a churchyard. Moreover, just as his imagination and the absence of memories about his parents affect the emergence of his initial self-awareness, so too will Pip’s “fancy,” aided by his reluctance to remember his origins, influence the development of his identity as gentleman.

But aspects of death throughout *Great Expectations*, such as epitaphs, churchyards, funerals, and elegiac allusions which provide a commentary upon Pip’s development, also connect Pip’s life as a gentleman with his graveyard experiences and his encounter with the man who introduces the link between gentility and crime: “He’s a gentleman, if you please, this villain. Now the Hulks has got its gentleman again, through

me” (67; ch. 5). Magwitch here expresses the desire and the ability to control a gentleman forger (Compeyson) which he repeats with Pip, the gentleman from the forge.

Magwitch’s patronage of Pip, which originates in the graveyard, is characterised by Magwitch’s capacity to come back to life. Pip receives no comforting assurance as does David that the dead are “all lying in their graves at rest” (*David Copperfield* 12). Instead, as Magwitch leaves the churchyard he looks to Pip’s “young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in” (38; ch 1).

A Spoken Epitaph: “Whatsume’er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his hart”

Pip presents his churchyard encounter as a reference point for other experiences in his life, balancing his ignorance of its significance for him as a character with his awareness as narrator. Chapter 7 picks up the thread of Pip’s life after the convict interlude by referring back to that day and the birth of self amidst the dead: “At the time when I stood in the churchyard, reading the family tombstones, I had just enough learning to be able to spell them out. My construction even of their simple meaning was not very correct” (73; ch. 7). As Brooks observes, “The question of reading and writing – of learning to compose and decipher texts – is persistently thematised in the novel” (*Reading* 116). The revelation of Pip’s scholarly aspirations and the ensuing discussion between him and Joe occur with references to death that form part of the novel’s mode of commentary on Pip’s development. Pip places this episode squarely within the context of the convict experiences: “[I]t must have been a full year after our hunt upon the marshes,

for it was a long time after, and it was winter and a hard frost” (75). Later, after the discussion with Joe and just before Mrs Joe and Pumblechook arrive with the summons to Satis House, Pip reflects on the coldness of the night: “A man would die to-night of lying out on the marshes, I thought. And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude” (80). Pip’s only experience of a man lying out in the marshes is the convict, so this reflection rounds off the discussion of education, death, and memory that began with an explicit reference to the “hunt upon the marshes” (75). Allusions such as these reinforce the importance of the churchyard encounter and the whole convict experience on Pip’s sense of self and his world view. In this chapter they frame the account of his relationship with Joe and his own efforts to raise himself.

Pip’s pride in his literacy and his “modest patronage” (76) of Joe at this point are as harmless as his efforts at self-education are commendable. However, this scene also prepares the way for Pip’s embarrassment at Joe’s lack of education, his impatience with Joe’s being “a most dull scholar” (78), and his condescending attitude to the inhabitants of his village once he receives his expectations. Joe’s account of his thwarted education indicates the tension between Pip’s aspirations and his origins and environment, and draws upon the language of death in doing so. Joe has as much pride in the epitaph he composed as Pip does in his letter, and he remembers his father in a way that downplays his violence: “Whatsome’er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his heart” (77). Paroissien identifies Joe’s epitaph as a homely couplet of the kind that was “the object of scorn by those campaigning for a plain unadorned style” (79). This epitaph was never inscribed because “poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or

large” (77) and a decent Victorian funeral was a costly affair. Joe says that “[n]ot to mention bearers, all the money that could be spared were wanted for my mother” (77).

Joe’s epitaph illustrates how the language of death is used to contextualise and comment upon the issues of memory, inscription, respect for the dead and the respectability of the living while also revealing aspects of Pip’s identity. Joe conformed to the social pressure for a public display of respectability, paying his respects by paying for some funeral trappings. In the memorialising of his father, Joe reveals a tension between the unpleasant facts and the desirable softening of memory in death, a tension that Pip senses and which prevents him from understanding the epitaph. His response to Joe is “I didn’t see; but I didn’t say so” (77) and we are compelled to agree with him: Joe’s father was a violent drunkard who beat his wife and son, forced them to stay with him, “broke” his wife’s spirit, prevented Joe from going to school and set him to work as a blacksmith to support the family. Pip doesn’t understand the epitaph because, despite Joe’s careful choice of words, including the understatement that this was a drawback on his learning (77), he sees the injustice and brutality that is effaced by the epitaph. Jack Rawlins argues that for Dickens “the essential act of goodness is Joe’s dead wrong insistence that his father was a good man. [. . .] The goodness is all in Joe, who imposes it on the world by the simple act of assuming it. Pip is immune to this kind of goodness in the beginning, as he makes clear in his response to Joe’s judgement of his father – the man wasn’t good, and nothing can make Pip overlook that” (83). Although the epitaph demonstrates Joe’s goodness and forgiving nature, there is an undercurrent of unease at what seems to be a blatant misrepresentation of facts.

This unease is ostensibly allayed when Pip, overwhelmed by Joe's generosity in taking him in with his sister, breaks out "crying and begging pardon" (78) but this is really a side-stepping of the issue of appropriate remembrance. Pip need not beg pardon for being an ungrateful burden because Joe does not consider him as such. In the context of this episode Pip is begging pardon for his condescension towards Joe and for failing to realise the merit in Joe's effort at commemoration and memorialising. These are more properly the faults of the older Pip and in this respect Pip's apology anticipates his later feelings of shame, the rejection of his origins and his suppression of any memory of his past. Thus the epitaph here is a means by which Dickens can reveal the complexities that beset issues of remembrance. Joe represents one variation of memory offered for Pip's instruction. His epitaph indicates the need for forgiveness and implies that the ability to live comfortably with oneself may depend upon a more charitable if not creative acceptance of the past than bare facts would allow. As Smith observes, "One does not construct memorials to a person's demerits" (*Mourning Tongues* 53), but one does need to admit the past before it can be mourned and memorialised. In this way, an appropriate memorialising process may ultimately facilitate the ideal balance between the past and present, and the realisation of a stable identity.

The textual context of Joe's epitaph relates it to Pip's more conventional educational aspirations, thus commenting upon the suitability of Pip's desire to be a scholar and to teach Joe. Joe warns Pip that their learning must be done on the sly because Mrs Joe "an't over partial to having scholars on the premises" for fear that Joe "might rise. Like a sort of rebel" (79). Pip naturally asks why Joe does not rise, to which Joe replies that he errs on the side of caution and softness in his treatment of Mrs Joe out

of memory for his mother's unhappy situation. His epitaph may have made the memory of his father palatable but what has been effaced in the memorial contributes to Joe's domestic "ill-convenience" as he acquiesces to injustices that Pip keenly feels: "I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me" (92). Joe recognises that his chosen ineffectuality produces a domestic imbalance that affects Pip: "[T]his is the up-and-down-and-straight on it, Pip, and I hope you'll overlook shortcomings" (80). At this point Pip does overlook Joe's shortcomings, instinctively comprehending the spirit of gentle charity that engenders them: "[A]fterwards at quiet times when I sat looking at Joe and thinking about him, I had a new sensation of feeling conscious that I was looking up to Joe in my heart" (80).

This episode also hints at the potential incompatibility of their respective attitudes: Joe's decision not to rise is accepted by young Pip, but is at odds with the connection established between acquiring knowledge and rebelling against one's origins. Pip finds other shortcomings that he is less willing to overlook: first, when exposed to the destabilising influence of Satis House, and later when given the opportunity to rise socially. The very day after this epitaph episode, Pip makes his first visit to Satis House, the place of "sick fancies" (88; ch. 8), and returns with the seeds of a specifically social dissatisfaction planted, feeling "ignorant and backward" (100). Joe's response alludes to but does not alleviate the class anxiety that has gripped Pip: "Whether common ones as to callings and earnings [. . .] mightn't be the better of continuing for to keep company with common ones, instead of going out to play with uncommon ones [. . .] is a thing as can't be looked into now" (100). Joe thus avoids the difficult, uneasy issue of class just as he avoids facing difficult memories. Although Joe here articulates a crucial theme of *Great*

Expectations, he simultaneously marginalises it, thus indicating an inadequate understanding of Pip's character.

Pip Memorialised by Joe

Once Pip becomes "late of this parish" Joe attempts to creatively memorialise their relationship so that the distance that develops between them is akin to a separation imposed by death. It is only by regarding Pip as dead that Joe is able to cope with their altered relationship. The earlier episode where Joe carries a message from Miss Havisham to Pip in London may be interpreted as Joe paying his first respects to Pip as a gentleman and his last respects to the Pip that was "ever the best of friends." Joe's solution to the distance created by Pip's expectations is thus similar to the epitaph that he created to soften the memory of his father. He places his relationship with Pip in the past and retreats from Pip in situations that threaten to destabilise the memory that Joe has constructed in order to cope with the altered reality. Pip's altered circumstances remain for Joe "a thing as can't be looked into." In a sense, then, Joe is living in the past and the text does not straightforwardly endorse this position: the past, that is, Pip's childhood and upbringing, were not ideal, and the life into which he was born "is one of minimal promise and limited potential" (*Great Expectations* introduction 25). Whereas the past enshrined in memory comforts Joe, it only brings unease and instability to Pip. It reminds him that he was not content with his place in life or society and that his upbringing was hard and far from idyllic.

At this stage, neither Joe nor Pip has a balanced relationship with memory. Pip rejects the past outright, admitting nothing that might undermine the present and future

that he has imagined as his reality. Joe occupies the other extreme: he embraces the past and refuses to admit of change. A most important difference between them is that Pip, unlike Joe, ultimately learns to admit memories and to accept the past. This in turn enables him to forgive, thereby to attain the appropriate memorialising that is needed for a more honest and harmonious sense of self. As he says to Joe after Magwitch's death, "We have had a time together, Joe, that I can never forget. There were days once, I know, that I did for a while forget; but I never shall forget these" (480; ch. 57). Pip has learnt that unedited admission and acceptance of the past is necessary for forgiveness, and that forgiveness is a vital factor in acceptance of one's present. It is possibly this awareness that urges the convalescing Pip to broach the subject of Magwitch to Joe. But Joe evades this discussion, resisting the intrusion of the intervening events and treating Pip in such a way that, as Pip says, "I would half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever that was gone" (476).

Joe realises that the domestic situation contributed to the young Pip's reticence concerning the convicts (478), yet by casting as inadmissible the intervening events of Pip's years he effectively denies Pip the opportunity to explain himself, negating the potential for a more balanced understanding between them. In suppressing the topic, in effacing the past, Joe denies the right conditions for forgiveness.³⁶ When Pip asks Joe to forgive him in the next chapter Joe replies "God knows as I forgive you, if I have anythink to forgive!" (488; ch. 58). It is perhaps the ultimate, concealed unfulfilled expectation in *Great Expectations* that the supreme indication of Pip's redemption and moral rebirth is his ability to explicitly ask for forgiveness, and that this reconciliation

³⁶ Joe's inadequacy in matters of memory, forgiveness and understanding of Pip need not undermine his goodness. It simply testifies to the difficulty that Pip experiences in understanding his place in a changing world, a world more complex than the one Joe represents or understands.

impulse should be, in this reading, frustrated. The retrospective inscription of *Great Expectations* as Pip's life draws to an end thus constitutes an epitaphic request for understanding and forgiveness.

Joe's Epitaph: Uninscribed and Universal

Joe's epitaph ("Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his hart") is homely and reveals an effacement of memory that has consequences for Pip's life as well as his own. The merit of his epitaph is that it never found inscription on the tombstone: it never came under public gaze, subject to the kind of mis-construction that characterised Pip's interpretation of his parents' epitaphs, but remains personal to Joe who retains control over its distribution and interpretation. An unwritten epitaph is capable of universal application, not restricted to the original subject, thus enhancing its instructive function. Joe applies it to Pumblechook when he has been robbed by Orlick: "And whatsume'er the failings on his part, he were a corn and seedsman in his heart" (475; ch. 57). Pumblechook is a hypocrite whose "manners is given to blustering" (475) and the re-working of the epitaph is to nice comic effect. Pumblechook's failings remain, unredeemed by any goodness in his heart. An earlier, more poignant ascription of the epitaph occurs when Joe is asked by Miss Havisham how Pip feels about being his apprentice. Joe addresses his answer to Pip:

'Which it is well beknown to yourself, Pip,' returned Joe, strengthening his former mixture of argumentation, confidence, and politeness, 'that it were the wish of your own hart.' (I saw the idea suddenly break upon him that he would adapt his epitaph to the occasion, before he went on to say)

‘And there weren’t no objection on your part, and Pip it were the great wish of your hart!’ (128; ch. 13)

Like the inscription on Philip Pirrip’s stone, Joe’s epitaph in both its adapted forms and in its original is to become a significant comment upon Pip’s identity and on Joe’s inability to understand the personal conflict which Pip’s experiences at Satis House have produced. The adaptation of the epitaph marks the death of the Pip who had written “wEn i M preNgtD 2 u JO woT larX” (75; ch. 7), a death that began when Pip’s personal aspirations and ‘fancy’ came into contact with the oppressive, class-laden atmosphere of Satis House, a place associated with death and an extremely unbalanced, indeed unhealthy, conjunction of memory and mourning. Pip walks home from his first visit there “deeply revolving that I was a common labouring-boy [. . .] that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and that generally I was in a low-lived bad way” (94; ch. 8). The application of Joe’s epitaph to Pip during Pip’s last “official” visit to Miss Havisham achieves a new meaning along with resonances of the original. It was the great wish of Pip’s heart but it has been supplanted by a new wish and a great dissatisfaction with his lot in life of which Joe is unaware because Pip, despite his failings, is sensitive enough of Joe’s feelings and of his duty to Joe to utter no objection and Joe is not capable of comprehending one.

Joe’s epitaph is applicable throughout the text in its original form. It expresses a sentiment of universal relevance, that a person’s thoughts, conscience and good intentions may be betrayed by actions, justifications and weaknesses that are inherent in the human condition. Joe’s epitaph may be applied without alteration to most of the characters in *Great Expectations*, but most particularly to Pip. Its exhortation to the reader to

remember, commonly used in churchyards, was never inscribed in stone, but finally achieves inscription in the extended epitaph offered by Pip's narrative. Pip uses a similar epitaphic technique when he addresses his readers thus: "Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day" (101; ch. 9). Many of the failures on Pip's part stem from his excessive reliance on memories of his Satis House experiences and his exclusion of earlier memorable days such as that with which the novel opened. The destabilising effect of Satis House on Pip's self-identity and memory is evident after his initial visit: "I fell asleep recalling what I 'used to do' when I was at Miss Havisham's [. . .] as though it were quite an old subject of remembrance, instead of one that had arisen only that day" (101). Pip's memoir records the process by which he achieves a more balanced and perceptive interpretation of experiences and "memorable days." Admitting the entire past into his memory enables Pip to attain an acceptance of his personal and public self that is elusive for most of the novel. Pip learns that the most comfortable life/self comes from proper mourning, which depends on forgiveness which requires acceptance of all one's memories and past experiences. As the inscription of Pip's life, *Great Expectations* incorporates Joe's epitaph just as it incorporates all the examples of memory, mourning and epitaphic intent by which Pip achieves a synthesis of memory and mourning that will enable him to memorialise successfully.

Reminders of the Churchyard: Death as a Barometer of Pip's Moral Status

Aspects of death not only serve as a reminder of Pip's originating moments with the convict: as in *David Copperfield* they serve also as a moral barometer of the hero's moral and emotional development, thus indicating that one's attitude to the material and memorialising aspects of death has consequences for one's character and self-development. The book of Pip's remembrance is full of moments that point to the presence in his life of the man he met in the graveyard, moments that began soon after that event and which he never recognises as being more than coincidence or shameful reminders of a low connection that is incompatible with his raised position. For Pip, exposed to the class-saturated atmosphere of Satis House and hankering after money and education as the trappings of gentility, it becomes a "guilty coarse and common thing [. . .] to be on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts" (107-08; ch. 10). During his "time" as apprentice, Pip remembers that "I used to stand about the churchyard on Sunday evenings when night was falling, comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were" (135; ch. 14).

Any reference to the churchyard is both a personal and a textual reminder of Pip's childhood experience. Particularly relevant is Pip's reference to the "novelty of emancipation" (173; ch. 19) when released from his indentures. This marks a strong connection with the convict that Pip helped gain release from his physical fetters. In the evening, Pip passes the church and feels "a sublime compassion for the poor creatures who were destined to go there, Sunday after Sunday, all their lives through, and to lie obscurely at last among the low green mounds" (173). Paroissien comments on this

allusion to Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, where the "rude Forefathers of the Hamlet sleep" and the lesson to be learned is that "[t]he Paths of Glory lead but to the Grave" (164).³⁷ Colin Manlove similarly observes that "*Great Expectations* is often very close in character to Gray's *Elegy*, which also opens on a late afternoon in a country churchyard full of shapeless tombs with inadequate legends. The theme of resistance to grave-like circumspection of one's talents in Dickens' novel is very like that of the *Elegy*, with its larger motif of the refusal of the dead to rest quiet" (71). Pip surveying his "flat and low" perspective in the churchyard expresses just such dissatisfaction with his restrictive environment. Iain Crawford examines in more detail the allusions to Gray's *Elegy*. He argues that the two allusions to the *Elegy* (the opening of the novel and the more explicit allusion in chapter 19) indicate Pip's "moral and spiritual progress and his willingness to admit his shame over his youthful behaviour" (197). Crawford concludes that the *Elegy* plays "an unobtrusive yet significant role in Pip's recording of his progress towards grace. First appearing as an indicator of his initial helplessness, the poem later becomes a method through which the narrating Pip codifies and thus comes to terms with the errors of his youth" (198).

The second allusion to the *Elegy* is immediately followed by an explicit reference by Pip to the convict:

If I had often thought with something allied to shame, of my
 companionship with the fugitive whom I had once seen limping among
 these graves, what were my thoughts on this Sunday, when the place
 recalled the wretch, ragged and shivering, with his felon iron and badge!

³⁷ Micawber quotes from the *Elegy* before his "explosion" of Heep, signing the letter in epitaphic delight "With the plain Inscription, WILKINS MICAWBER" (*David Copperfield* 581; ch. 49).

My comfort was, that it happened a long time ago, and that he had doubtless been transported a long way off, and that he was dead to me, and might be veritably dead into the bargain. (173; ch. 19)

The text thus makes a point of mentioning Magwitch on the very day that Pip is released from the fetters that bound him to his apprenticeship and life at the forge and as he, like David, contemplates his future. However, Pip's attitude to his past and memories differs greatly from David Copperfield's as this parody of a graveyard reverie demonstrates. Throughout his life David laments the early separation from the churchyard where his parents are buried and mourns the passing of his childhood that this exile represents. By contrast, Pip has longed for an end to his childhood experiences and welcomes the distance from his origins. His graveyard reveries involve shame or "a gallon of condescension" (173) and relief that his past is apparently "dead and buried" rather than the softened and humble thoughts that a churchyard should evoke. Unlike David, Pip has no personal memory of either of his parents: in their place is the memory of Magwitch. Thus, in an inversion of the memorialising process by which the dead are domesticated and imaginatively integrated with the living, Pip mourns his personal experience of the convict and finds comfort in imaginatively banishing him to death. It is not until Magwitch returns from the realm of the dead to which Pip's memory has consigned him that Pip realises the true basis and nature of his expectations.

Pip Pays his Last Respects

Mrs Joe's death and Pip's account of her funeral is a fine example of the elder Pip's retrospective attempt to offer his life as an epitaph and be remembered well when

dead. Herbert perceives that the letter containing the news of the death is associated with death because of “its heavy black seal and border” (297; ch. 35).³⁸ The letter is signed “Trabb and Co.” because Trabb, like Omer, “combines the two trades of tailor and undertaker – a plausible arrangement because Victorian funeral practices required men skilled in the use of large quantities of cloth” (Paroissien 287). Paroissien continues:

Nineteenth-century undertakers often described themselves as Furnishing Undertakers to convey the range of services they provided, for example: supplying mourning dress for the bereaved family and the family servants, and for mutes and other attendants; decorating the house where the funeral reception was held; and providing additional trappings, including capes, yards of silk, crape, or cloth for hat-bands and grave clothes for the deceased. (287)

As we shall see, Trabb meets all the undertaking conventions of which Dickens was so critical, but we are also reminded that he was connected with Pip’s sudden rise to gentleman, being the person responsible for fitting Pip out in “an article much in vogue among the nobility and gentry” (178). His return in the role of undertaker is an example of the many details in *Great Expectations* that relate aspects of death to Pip’s development.

Trabb employs formal language in the letter, the contents of which Pip gives as saying “that I was an honoured sir, and that they begged to inform me that Mrs J. Gargery had departed this life on Monday last [. . .] and that my attendance was requested at the interment on Monday next at three o’clock in the afternoon” (297; ch. 34). Even though

³⁸ “Etiquette dictated that letters to gentleman should always be sealed with wax (*Etiquette for Gentlemen*, 1838, 21), while mourning practices dictated the use of black wax and paper with black borders along the edges on appropriate occasions” (Paroissien 287).

there is the customary delay before the funeral, Pip does not go to comfort Joe immediately. He performs the bare minimum that the occasion requires, writing to Joe “to offer consolation, and to assure him that I should come” (297-98) but withholding that which would most cheer Joe: his presence. This is another of the ways in which Pip attempts to marginalise his past, by neglecting the bonds of duty and mutual affection that tie him to Joe. Indeed, his sister’s death prompts the first visit that Pip makes to the forge since leaving it, although he visits his village and Satis House on other occasions. Moreover, he will make no further visits until he returns after Magwitch’s death intending to ask Biddy to marry him but finding her married to Joe. Pip’s ignorance of his sister’s decline and death and, later, of the change in Joe and Biddy’s relationship testifies to the extent to which he has distanced himself from his past life and his origins. Although he reproaches Biddy after the funeral for not having written sooner about “these sad matters” (301; ch. 35), the inscribing Pip knows that his ignorance results from his own neglect of his past. Mrs Joe’s funeral thus functions in a most timely way to illustrate the effect of Pip’s expectations on his character, occurring as it does a year after Pip received these and left for London.

Pip opens the funeral chapter by saying that “[i]t was the first time that a grave had opened in my road of life, and the gap it made in the smooth ground was wonderful” (297; ch. 35).³⁹ On one level this is true: it is Pip’s first actual experience of death, but this statement simultaneously recalls and denies the first recorded memory in the book of

³⁹ Garret Stewart observes of this opening sentence of Chapter 35 that “[i]t is over the dead bodies of his natural and familial ties, so to speak, that Pip has smoothed his empty road to gentility” (197). Mrs Joe’s death constitutes a summons to the past that Pip, in the public fulfilment of his private duty, cannot ignore. Her death does upset the smooth path to gentility that he believes he has been set on, forcing him to return to the place that above all he wishes to avoid. Pip restricts himself as much as possible to the public aspect of his duty, resenting that he has been called down from his gentlemanly London position.

Pip's remembrance where Magwitch appears suddenly as if from a grave. This also looks forward to Magwitch's re-emergence from the dead on his return from "down under." Pip more explicitly alludes to his convict connection in saying that "I was seized with a violent indignation against the assailant from whom she had suffered so much" (297). Mrs Joe's death thus sustains the connection between Pip and his convict. Furthermore, it constitutes Pip's inscriptive attempt to offer his readers an honest account of the extent to which the failings of his younger self betrayed the goodness in his heart.

The extent to which Pip has forgotten his family is indicated by his remark that Mrs. Joe "had seldom or never been in my thoughts of late" (297) and he experiences none of death's softening influence until walking to the forge on the funeral morning:

[T]he times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, returned vividly. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me. (298)

This is one of the moments in *Great Expectations* that indicates the goodness in Pip's heart: he is now affected, albeit briefly, by the softening influence of death that he did not understand when younger.

An essential requirement of the moral development necessary for Pip to gain an integrated sense of self is a synthesis of memory and mourning. For this to occur, Pip needs to accept his past and make the necessary acts of forgiveness that will enable him to memorialise appropriately. The act of returning to the environment of his youth in the

circumstance of death prompts Pip to return in memory to his experiences there. Unlike Joe's more blanket censorship of his dead father's vices, Pip acknowledges Mrs Joe's flaws. This indicates that he is likely to achieve a more balanced memorialising process than Joe who says to Pip "you knowed her when she was a fine figure of a –" (299). Upon Mrs Joe's death Joe performs the same kind of effacement to render the past and the present palatable as that concerning the earlier discussion of his father's epitaph (ch. 7). As we have seen, his relationship with Pip involves a similar, death-like memorialising process which distorts reality, something in which Pip engages for so much of the inscribing of his own life.

Mrs Joe's funeral chapter marks an important stage in Pip's epitaphic awareness, revealing the many aspects of his identity that are either in conflict or have yet to be developed. The chapter illustrates the skilful interplay of satire and sympathy that Dickens creates in Pip and for him by showing how Pip's personal experience of death forms a satire on Victorian funeral practices.⁴⁰ This chapter shows Pip rejecting one public mode of hypocritical and false respectability – the funeral – while intent on preserving his own public display of respectable gentleman. In a reminder to the reader of both Pip's goodness and his failings, Dickens employs the funeral customs as a register of his moral strengths and weaknesses which indicates that Pip's morality is as unsettled as his sense of self, showing him to be at once sensitive and supercilious.

Pip demonstrates a keen awareness and dislike of Victorian funeral and mourning practices that were performed in accordance with popular and socially-compelling notions of "respectability." In expressing his distaste, Pip is more than a mouthpiece for

⁴⁰ Although the funeral takes place early in the century, in 1816 by Paroissien's reckoning (430), the entire episode is informed by issues surrounding death, funerals and mourning that reflect the time of writing *Great Expectations* and Dickens' own interests in this area.

Dickens' own opinions on funeral practices. Pip's account of Mrs Joe's funeral demonstrates that he has an authorially-approved sense of what is a fitting and meaningful method of interment and funeral behaviour.⁴¹ The difference between this and the actual funeral as "directed" by Trabb and Co. is indicated by the contrast between Pip's thoughts about the desirability of softened memory as he walks from the Blue Boar and the actual appearance of the forge: "I came in sight of the house, and saw that Trabb and Co. had put in a funereal execution and taken possession" (298).⁴² Pip goes on to observe all the details of a Victorian funeral that drew criticism from those like Dickens who called for simplicity, less expense, less deference to self-interested undertakers, and greater respect. Pip notes the mutes outside the house, two "dismally absurd persons, each ostentatiously exhibiting a crutch done up in a black bandage" (298). There are more sable warders inside the house where Trabb is draping the funeral party in Victorian mourning wear. Joe, singled out as chief mourner and seated apart by Trabb, has, like Matthew Pocket, been overwhelmed by society's insistence on "respectable" funerals. Joe articulates this Grundyism in action to Pip: "I would in preference have carried her to the church myself, along with three or four friendly ones wot come to it with willing harts and arms, but it were considered wot the neighbours would look down on such and would be of opinions as it were wanting in respect" (299).

⁴¹ The assigning to Pip of views that correspond with his creator's implies approval of Pip by an author who earlier in the novel used Victorian mourning customs to contrast Camilla, one of Miss Havisham's insinuating relations, with the disinterested Matthew Pocket. Camilla disparages Matthew for not "being induced to see the importance of the children's having the deepest of trimmings to their mourning [. . .] I said, 'It WILL NOT DO, for the credit of the family.' I told him that, without deep trimmings, the family was disgraced" (110; ch. 11).

⁴² Paroissien observes that "[t]he legal phraseology adapted from a bailiff's right to seize the goods of a debtor conveys the extent to which undertakers took over the house when they made their funeral arrangements" (288).

The funeral procession is typically working class in its arrangements and attracts local interest of the kind that was criticised by proponents of reform. Pip's observation that "the more youthful and vigorous part of the community [made] dashes now and then to cut us off, and [lay] in wait to intercept us at points of vantage" (300) is remarkably similar to his experience of Trabb's boy upon his first return to the village as a London gentleman. On that occasion Trabb's boy had assaulted Pip's self-satisfaction by mimicking Pip's condescending aloofness and voicing Pip's general attitude to the place and its inhabitants: "Don't know yah, don't know yah, pon my soul don't know yah!" (267). However, during the procession Pip is not pleased with the attentions shown to him and his critique of funeral customs indicates that he is fundamentally of a sensibility that rejects sham and false, socially-dictated notions of respectability.

At this stage in Pip's progress this sensibility is limited to such obvious instances as a funeral, but there is the implication that the feelings and perceptions that Pip experiences during his sister's funeral may be extended to other areas of his life. This experience of death prompts Pip to admit some memories of his past which consequently open his eyes to certain falsehoods and self-deceptions. One of these is Pip's reassessment of Pumblechook, showing that he is no longer as susceptible to Pumblechook's flattering attentions as he was when he first received his expectations. At that time Pip was "convinced that I had been much mistaken in him, and that he was a sensible practical good-hearted prime fellow" (181; ch. 19). However, the funeral causes Pip to revise his opinion to one that adheres more to his childhood experience of Pumblechook, by implication a more truthful one. Repulsed by the "servile" Pumblechook, Pip is also critical of the Hubbles' "decent" display of grief, perceiving

that both “were surpassingly conceited and vainglorious at being members of so distinguished a procession” (300; ch. 35). Pip finds it inappropriate that during the burial service Pumblechook’s conduct is all addressed to him: “[E]ven when those noble passages were read which remind humanity how it brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out, and how it fleeth like a shadow and never continueth long in one stay, I heard him cough a reservation of the case of a young gentleman who had come unexpectedly into large property” (300). This indicates an appreciable change in Pip’s attitude since the day his indentures were destroyed: “I went to church with Joe, and thought, perhaps the clergyman wouldn’t have read that about the rich man and the kingdom of Heaven, if he had known all” (173; ch. 19). This first experience of death affects Pip’s perception of the world and the “worldly minded” (300), such as Pumblechook and the Hubbles. For the first time he is personally exposed to the idea of remembrance, which involves acceptance of the past and a softening of memory.

The description of the funeral preparations, the mutes, bearers, warders, and the procession, provides a sharp contrast with the simplicity of Pip’s account of the burial. After his depiction of the funeral “mummery” his personal observation rings all the more clear and poignant: “[W]e went into the churchyard, close to the graves of my unknown parents, Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above. And there, my sister was laid quietly in the earth while the larks sang high above it, and the light wind strewed it with beautiful shadows of clouds and trees” (300; ch. 35). This passage comments upon Pip’s progress in various ways. It presents him as a sympathetic mourner, one who is sensitive to and moved by the solemnity of the occasion. The references to his parents remind us of his youthful contemplation of their graves and the

events that ensued. Indeed, the next paragraph mentions “the founder of [Pip’s] fortunes and [his] earliest benefactor” (301). This, of course, is Pumblechook, Pip’s self-appointed patron, but the proximity of such a reference to the graveyard scene is one of the many such references throughout *Great Expectations* that sustain the memory of Pip’s convict encounter for the reader if not, at this stage, for him. And although Pip has re-discovered his ability to see Pumblechook for what he is, this perspicacity does not extend to the Pip-appointed patron, Miss Havisham.

The reference to his father’s epitaph is significant. It is a reminder that Pip shares his father’s name and that his earlier realisation of identity was accompanied by an awareness of the existence of death and his own mortality. Pip now shares the application of his father’s epitaph since he, too, has become “late of this parish.” Trabb’s boy’s earlier comic “don’t know yah” is capable of a more serious application: it indicates that everyone connected with Pip’s past life have become unknown, because “unknowable” to him as a London gentleman. The public performance of the funeral temporarily overshadows this aspect of Pip’s character. Although he says that the “house felt wholesome” (301) once Trabb and the others have left, the protection offered by the public duties disappears, leaving Pip to interact with Joe and Biddy in a “private and personal capacity.” It becomes apparent that Pip’s softening of memory and his rejection of sham and false respectability are of a limited kind as yet. The funeral elicits feelings from Pip that do not carry over into his life as his behaviour to Joe and Biddy in the rest of the chapter testifies. Pip is well aware that this is his first visit to the forge since leaving and, to deflect his own feelings of guilt about neglecting his family, he reproaches Biddy for not having written to him about these “sad matters” (301). His

neglect means that he was absent from his sister's deathbed and he has to hear about it second-hand from Biddy.

Biddy's account of Mrs Joe's death is part of the greater effect that the news of her death and his return for her funeral has on Pip. Moreover, Mrs Joe's last words convey an epigraphic and memorialising significance that contributes to Pip's instruction in the creation of an epitaph. Mrs Joe's last words are "Joe" "Pardon" "Pip" (302; ch. 35), an utterance that conforms to the death-bed impulse to make peace with the world before departing it.⁴³ Pip's absence means that "he is not on hand to receive his valedictory request for forgiveness from his sister" (Stewart 197). Thus, the "Pardon" extends to Pip by implication but is more directly attached to Joe's name. Stewart describes Mrs Joe's last words as "a kind of chiasmic shorthand for "Joe, forgive me, and may (you) Pip too" (197).⁴⁴ Though Pip is moved by this narrated death bed he fails to transfer this softened feeling to his relationships with Biddy and Joe. He keeps Biddy at a distance, taking "as stately a leave of her as I could, in my murmuring soul, deem reconcilable with the churchyard and the events of the day" (304; ch. 35). Pip thus uses the funeral as an excuse to avoid confronting his "chronic unease" regarding his treatment of his oldest friends. He also takes advantage of this experience of death to make his final farewells: his sister's death has left him without any remaining blood relatives and her funeral

⁴³ Jalland notes some features of the 'Good Death' in her discussion of the Evangelical ideal: "Death ideally should take place at home, with the dying person making explicit farewells to each family member. [. . .] The dying person should be conscious and lucid until the end, resigned to God's will, able to beg forgiveness for past sins and to prove his or her worthiness for salvation" (*Victorian Family* 26).

⁴⁴ In his discussion of the "collapsed grammar" of these words, Stewart argues that "'Pardon' then becomes not static noun but active verb in a deflection of the dying woman's wish for leniency onto Pip as well, not only for his subliminal complicity in her own brutal humiliation by Orlick's hammer but for his desertion of Joe's hearth and heart in his gentlemanly progress" (196-97).

represents the final severing of his connection with his childhood home. From now he will truly become dead to his past.

The sudden resurrection of Pip's past upon Magwitch's return moves him towards a greater awareness of the need and desire to be reconciled with oneself and with others. Consequently, he is more sympathetic to the reconciliation impulse when he later visits Miss Havisham, a woman who has figuratively been on her death bed as long as Pip has known her. Miss Havisham makes the connection between knowledge and forgiveness that is necessary for more equal and enlightened relationships: "If you knew all my story [. . .] you would have some compassion for me and a better understanding of me' (412; ch. 49). Pip's treatment of Miss Havisham in this episode demonstrates the progress he is making towards the construction of the epitaph that he offers the reader of his life. Miss Havisham expresses a hope that someday Pip will be able to inscribe his forgiveness under her name on the tablet she gives him, providing him with the means of inscription. Although Pip says "I can do it now" (410), there is no indication in the text that he does inscribe his forgiveness on the tablet. He acknowledges his ability to forgive Miss Havisham but neither utters nor inscribes specific words of pardon. Pip's inability to do this is one of the failings that readers of his extended epitaph are asked to overlook by heeding the epitaphic declaration that he is good in his heart. Proof of this is given when Pip makes an explicit, though inarticulate, act of forgiveness in taking his final leave of Miss Havisham: "I leaned over and touched her lips with mine, just as they said, not stopping for being touched, 'Take the pencil and write under my name, "I forgive her"' (415).

“A Voice from the Darkness Beneath”: From Life to Death

The greatest impetus that Pip's moral growth receives comes with Magwitch's return, which forces Pip to acknowledge the enduring presence of the past, of what is dead and buried. This forces Pip to admit the memories of his past and to accept them without fancy or selectivity. He recognises all the moments in the “book of his remembrance” (364; ch. 42) that pointed to the presence in his life of the man he met in the graveyard, moments that began soon after that event and which he never admits as being more than coincidence or anything other than a shameful stain to be repressed. Magwitch's return is thus also the impetus for Pip examining his past and realising a more integrated identity than any previously.

Magwitch's return harks back to the opening scene of the novel and is rich in allusions to coming back from the dead. Even the sound of his footstep causes Pip to start “and awfully connect it with the footstep of [his] dead sister” (332; ch. 39). This allusion to his sister raises the subject of death and recalls the connection between Pip and Magwitch because of the leg iron that was used to strike her. Here, as in the opening scene, Magwitch's appearance is preceded by Pip's thoughts of his departed family members. After these memories of the past and of death comes the “voice from the darkness beneath” (332) that heralds the return of Magwitch. This phrase hints both at the darkness of the grave from which it seemed that Magwitch first appeared as Pip then contemplated his dead parents and siblings, and the darkness of Australia, a figurative grave for those that stained the social fabric of England. Wemmick had earlier described Jagers as being “[d]eep [. . .] as Australia. [. . .] If there was anything deeper [. . .] he'd

be it' (222; ch. 24). This is one of those references that Pip disregards in his pursuit of expectations based on fancy rather than memory.

The moment of recognition takes place without any of the visual clues that Magwitch gives: "If the wind and the rain had driven away the intervening years, had scattered all the intervening objects, had swept us to the churchyard where we first stood face to face on such different levels, I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now" (333; ch. 39). Even before Pip's realises his present link with Magwitch, his presence causes him to lose his "self-possession" (334), an ironic foreshadowing of the shock to Pip's identity that is caused by the re-appearance of a man who had "started up from among the graves" (36) and to whom he owes the possessions on which he has based his new identity. Pip is borne down by the truth of his position: as in the earlier scene his surroundings "surge and turn" and Magwitch catches him, bringing his face near (337). The implications of the graveyard are made explicit when Magwitch proclaims "I'm your second father. You're my son" (337) and the life-returning potential of Magwitch is realised: "I was sent for life. It's death to come back" (340).

Before the moment of comprehension Pip is briefly "softened by the softened aspect of the man" (335) whose eyes "were full of tears," but recollections and remembrances then make Magwitch a "dreadful burden" (341). The abhorrence that Pip feels towards Magwitch only begins to be replaced by compassion and understanding when Magwitch relates his personal history, but not "like a song or a story-book. [. . .] I'll put it at once into a mouthful of English" (360). Magwitch has a "book of his remembrance" (364) and the telling of his story engages his listeners' attention and elicits

their sympathy much as Pip's book does from its readers. Enabling Magwitch to tell his story prepares the way for Pip to soften towards him: understanding gives birth to pity, a sense of duty, compassion, forgiveness, and love. Pip's decision to publicly support Magwitch in court and through his death in prison is a more consciously "noble" act than his earlier assistance which was motivated by fear more than compassion. It marks the resurgence of the goodness in his heart, being a conscious acceptance of the social death that such a personal association will bring.⁴⁵

"The Dread of Being Misremembered After Death" (436; Ch. 53)

Pip's "time" as a London gentleman is characterised by self-doubt and discomfort as he struggles to forge a new identity that replaces rather than incorporates his earlier one. Pip expresses his feeling of uncertainty and dependency to Herbert: "I was a blacksmith's boy but yesterday; I am – what shall I say I am – to-day?" (269; ch. 30). Magwitch's second appearance essentially returns Pip to the graveyard episode where he was studying his origins and attempting to come to an awareness of himself. The first step in this process is the loss of self-possession that accompanies recognition of Magwitch. Then, when Pip visits Miss Havisham, no longer his self-imagined benefactor, he presents himself to her with a statement of self: "It is I, Pip" (408; ch. 49); informing Herbert that Magwitch is Estella's father he says "I know I am quite myself" (419; ch. 50); and the chapter after Magwitch's death opens with "[n]ow that I was left wholly to myself" (470; ch. 57).

⁴⁵ As Grahame Smith argues, Pip's decision to stand by Magwitch "is one that surely would cut him off completely from polite society. His being 'whisked off' to the East, far from being a device to avoid commitment, is rather a recognition of how far Pip has placed himself outside the pale of English society" (181).

Pip's presence at a death-bed scene signals the extent of his moral regeneration but the ambiguity of his benediction for Magwitch, "O Lord, be merciful to him, a sinner" (470; ch. 56) subtly indicates to the reader that some of Pip's failings remain. The substitution of "him, a sinner" for the biblical "me, a sinner" indicates that forgiveness is something that Pip is now able to grant, but which he struggles to ask for himself. Furthermore, Joe's presence during Pip's convalescence makes Pip "half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever" (476). Joe not only recreates the earlier time by which he has memorialised Pip, but also his refusal to discuss recent events prevents the understanding that would fulfil Pip's reconciliation impulse as well as enlightening him to the altered relationship between Joe and Biddy.

This silencing of Pip's story also encourages his belief that he can set aside the intervening years and deny that they happened, as Joe does. Pip's remaining fault is to think that he can efface the consequences and memories of his earlier failings. He believes that he can deconstruct the self he has become by exclusively reclaiming his former self. Thus, the expectation that he can marry Biddy is the last delusion of which he must be abused before he realises that the intervening years are as integral to his identity as his earlier memories. Only when this expectation is shown to be unrealisable and every single one of Pip's expectations that was based on a denial of memory or an unbalanced remembrance has been dashed, is Pip able to express a desire for forgiveness. Pip expresses the importance of a balanced memory to Joe, when recovering from fever: "There were days once, I know, that I did for a while forget; but I never shall forget these" (480; ch. 57). He repeats this to Biddy before meeting Estella: "I have forgotten

nothing in my life that ever had a foremost place there, and little that ever had any place there” (490; ch. 59).

Pip expresses his acceptance of his entire past after taking his namesake to the churchyard, “[S]etting him on a certain tombstone there” and showing him “from that elevation which stone was scared to the memory of Philip Pirrip, late of this parish” (490; ch. 59). This represents both a return to and an acceptance of the epitaphic impulse of Pip’s life. Pip’s life story chronicles the process by which he learns to judge the worth of his memories and their importance in his fulfilment of public and private duties. Like the epitaph anthologies, Pip’s written memoir incorporates all the other stories and modes of remembrance from which he has gained instruction in forgiveness and mourning. The epitaph that frames Pip’s narrative indicates the possibility of re-reading and re-interpreting an inscription while the written offering of Pip’s life fulfils the epitaphic function of instruction and warning. He is not concerned with “the propriety of distinguishing himself after death” (Vita 30) but with being remembered well. Prevented throughout his life from articulating his story and thus receiving the forgiveness that comes from better understanding, Pip seeks understanding and compassion from those readers to whom he offers “the book of his remembrance.”

CHAPTER 4: THE BOOKS OF HIS REMEMBRANCE: DICKENS' LIFE IN MS

The last will and testament of Charles Dickens represents his attempt to create the ideal conditions for the memorialising of him in death.⁴⁶ His will follows the appropriate memorialising sequence with matters relating to more functional aspects of death (the funeral, site of burial, mourning dress) preceding those pertaining to commemoration (the monument and epitaph), thus adhering to the previously-made distinction between material aspects of death (see Introduction 5). The instructions signal a change in what Dickens believed would facilitate the ideal commemoration of him in death. They indicate a re-evaluation of the self that he wished to project posthumously, and an identity different to the one which, at the time of Mary Hogarth's death, had readily availed itself of the opportunity offered by the private cemeteries to purchase "a permanent stake in a development that consciously expressed a cognate gentility" (C. Brooks 11). Dickens no longer desired the personal affirmation that would be conferred by burial and commemoration in one of the large, suburban cemeteries. As Forster testifies, Dickens would have "preferred to lie in the small graveyard under Rochester castle wall, or in the little churches of Cobham or Shorne" (2: 417) rather than the burial he actually received in Westminster Abbey. Schlicke observes that "[i]t is perhaps a fitting irony that Dickens's last effort to exert mastery over his progress through the world was overturned by the supreme act of public recognition awarded to him on his journey out of it" (Schlicke 169).

⁴⁶ Forster reproduces the entire will at the end of his *Life of Dickens*, including the reference to Ellen Ternan about whom he otherwise preserves a telling silence.

Dickens' final instructions are consistent with his abiding dislike of the funerary and mourning customs of his time:

I emphatically direct that I be buried in an inexpensive, unostentatious, and strictly private manner; that no public announcement be made of the time or place of my burial; that at the utmost no more than three plain mourning coaches be employed; and that those who attend my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black bow, long hat-band, or other such revolting absurdity. (Forster 2: 421)

Dickens' "last words" thus articulate the difference between private respect and the public display of respectability that he propounded throughout his writing life.

Dickens' effort to shape his memory in death is also evident in the instructions for his epitaph: "I DIRECT that my name be inscribed in plain English letters on my tomb, without the addition of 'Mr.' or 'Esquire'" (Forster 2: 422). Accordingly, his tombstone reproduces only his name and the dates of his birth and death, inscribed with a simplicity of which he would have approved. As Forster notes, this may have mollified him somewhat for "the public homage of a burial in the Abbey [which] had to be reconciled with his own instructions" (2: 416). Dickens' instructions as to the material aspects of his death may be interpreted as attempting to wrest death away from the customs that perpetuated class difference and social hypocrisy, a plea to concentrate on paying respects to the dead rather than parading the respectability of the living. It may also be said that in death Dickens hoped to finally lay to rest anxieties regarding his personal identity and his public position that he tried to suppress in life, but which nevertheless found expression in his writing.

Dickens testamentary instructions are themselves a self-revelation of the connection between inscribing memory and inscribing fiction in the formation of self. He has come to believe that the most successful memorialising of him will look to the fictional experience of him before the factual:

I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works, and to the remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me in addition thereto. (Forster 2: 422)

The further prohibition on being made the subject of any posthumous “monument, memorial, or testimonial” (Forster 2: 422) reinforces Dickens’ belief that the only suitable subject for commemoration was the one he had inscribed himself over a writing life that spanned more than thirty years. Dickens sets out the conditions by which he should be memorialised: there is no “tender fiction” engraved on his tomb. His works will stand as his epitaph.

Of all Dickens’ works, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* most emphatically expose the tension between fact and fancy, writing and reading, inscription and interpretation, private and public, and memory and mourning that the creation of fiction shares with the memorialising process. Each text offers the inscription of personal memories for public consumption and interpretation. Dickens’ two entirely first-person narratives, both inscribed in the memoir form, fulfil the epitaphic functions of description and instruction whilst revealing the creative relationship between memory and mourning. The use of memory and the strong presence of material aspects of death in these most notably autobiographically-infused texts, establish these two books of remembrance as the foundation stones of Dickens’ memorial to himself. Dickens’ self-appointed

biographer, John Forster, singled out *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* as evidence of Dickens' ability and position:

It may be doubted if Dickens could better have established his right to the front rank among novelists claimed for him, than by the ease and mastery with which, in these two books of *Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, he kept perfectly distinct the two stories of a boy's childhood, both told in the form of autobiography. (2: 285)

These two autobiographical fictions explore the two components of memorialising, particularly the act of inscribing, and the act of reading and interpreting an inscription. The memorialising process illustrates the need for a balance in all areas of life and most particularly a balance between remembered facts and imaginative remembering. In *David Copperfield*, experiences of death illustrate the dangers of over editing memory: memorialising provides the means for reconstructing the past as ideal in order to deny experiences of betrayal. The consequences of this for an integrated sense of self are exposed by the inscription process, an ambiguous text being the product of an unstable self. In *Great Expectations*, as in *David Copperfield*, experiences and material aspects of death register the moral and emotional development of the inscribing self. In the later novel, the ideal softening of memory that is required for forgiveness and self-knowledge is shown to depend on the admittance of all memories. Rather than over edit, Pip attempts to excise a portion of his memory. His inscription reveals the consequences this had on his ability to successfully interpret events and people, himself included. As *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* demonstrate, both the inscription and the interpretation have a creative element, and so the memorialising process becomes a

vehicle for the search for an ideal balance between the past and present, the dead and the living, the creative impulse and earnest respectability.

As autobiographical fictions containing varying traces of fictional autobiography, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are complementary texts that attest to the memorialising function of Dickens' entire body of work. Dickens' testimonial instructions reinforce the case for his *corpus* constituting his self-constructed memorial, a commemorative object of far greater breadth and scope than could be found in a single tombstone or in any posthumous "monument, memorial, or testimonial" (Forster 2: 422) constructed to his memory. To preserve his memory for the future, and to prevent his memory from being misconstrued, Dickens directs that the remembrance of him in death be found in the "Shadowy World" (*David Copperfield* Preface xxi) of his fiction into which he has sent some part of himself. Dickens' awareness of the instability of memory, its vulnerability as well as its capacity to betray if not successfully treated, makes him chary of exposing his personal memory, untreated by imagination, to the uncertainty of public interpretation. Thus, Dickens directs that his memory be constructed from the interweaving of fact and fancy, reality and imagination that is present in his fiction: more so than in autobiography, as his unfinished fragment testifies, and more so than biography, even in Forster's pre-approved *Life of Dickens*. To apply the instructive lesson of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* that memorialising depends upon a balance of memory and mourning, the implication of Dickens' last written words is that both close mourners and the reading public will gain a personal experience of him in the publications that were the product of a personal union of fact and fancy, or that "dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" (*Bleak House* Preface 43). His efforts to direct

the memorialising of himself indicates a feeling akin to Pip's dread of being misremembered after death: like Pip, Dickens realises the potential for misinterpretation of inscription and of memory. As a professional inscriber of fiction, Dickens has more time and opportunity to shape his personal memory.

David Copperfield and *Great Expectations* thus represent Dickens' fictional achievement of what he could not accomplish in reality: the autobiographical inscription of self. In the terms established by this thesis, these two fictional memoirs testify to the possibility of constructing a greater, more complex memory of Dickens that incorporates memories and selves that span his writing life. Offering all his works as his remembrance increases the chance of Dickens being remembered and understood as a private individual as well as a famous author: his books comment on their creator as much as they do each other. The re-examination in *Great Expectations* of issues explored in *David Copperfield* reflects changes in Dickens, much as his final wish for a quiet burial in a rural churchyard marks a change from the young, parvenu author who had eagerly availed himself of a plot in Kensal Green. If Dickens' instructions and wishes are heeded, the ideal memorialising of him requires the personal contemplation of the inscribed monuments of fact and fancy that he has already created. Like Wemmick's prisoners, Dickens subverts the mourning process and pre-empts death by producing his own mourning tokens. All Dickens' written works may be regarded as such, but the material aspects of death and inscription that characterise *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* make them most naturally the first "memoirs" to consider.

Dickens and David

In words and tone, Dickens' 1850 Preface to *David Copperfield* intimates a sense of loss at the completion of writing that is similar to an experience of death. Dickens' regret at concluding this "Story" attests to the personal investment which this "task" generally involved: depicting the hero as a man of letters was a significant public and artistic affirmation of Dickens' belief in the moral and social importance of literature and literary men. This fictional portrayal of an individual engaged in a profession that had become so prominent in the nineteenth century was of personal significance for Dickens. *David Copperfield* constitutes an artistic and emotional stocktaking of Dickens' public and private achievements, ostensibly a celebration of memory that "draws more directly than any other on events in his life" (Schlicke 150). Dickens' personal communication with his reading public in the Preface intimates the difficulty (for Dickens and his readers) in clearly distinguishing Dickens the private individual from Dickens the public author. He refrains from "wearying the reader [. . .] with personal confidences, and private emotions" (*David Copperfield* xxi), thus ostensibly placing the author/reader relationship in the public sphere. This distinction is immediately blurred by the following aside: "Besides which, all that I could say of the Story, to any purpose, I have endeavoured to say in it" (xxi). This intimation that the text contains aspects of Dickens' personal thoughts and experiences is reinforced by his comment that, as Author, he "feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world," an alignment of self with the imaginative world that fiction shares with the memorialising process. Just as David denies the possibility of conveying his feelings about the warehouse time and then continues to express them, Dickens claims that this book is authoritative and needs

no more words from him but offers them anyway: “Yet I have nothing else to tell; unless, indeed, I were to confess [. . .] that no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing.” The Preface thus contains traces of the instabilities that make *David Copperfield* such an ambiguous and challenging text of memory, selfhood and inscription.

The textual ambiguity of *David Copperfield* has implications for the inscription and memorialising processes that go beyond the pages of David’s memoir. Gilmour observes that “*David Copperfield* is a novel of memory in a double sense: the “‘written memory’ of the character David Copperfield as well as the fictional transmutation of many of the memories of Dickens himself” (“Memory” 30). Although “[t]hese autobiographical aspects have been explored often enough” (Gilmour, “Memory” 30), Dickens’ final epitaphic fashioning of himself as a self-made “man of fiction” renders instructive an examination of his unfinished autobiography and his authorised biography. The circumstances surrounding the conception and writing of *David Copperfield* have been well-documented and critiqued, especially with regard to Dickens’ interest in the use and effect of memory at the time. His last Christmas Book, *The Haunted Man*, written in 1848, “[H]as come to be seen as a precursor to *David Copperfield* and as a document of biographical significance” (Schlicke 270). The story’s epigraph, “Lord, keep my memory green” (308), proclaims the importance of one’s personal memory but has the secondary meaning which expresses the desire that one is remembered in death by remaining in the memory of others. Dickens’ explanation of the story reveals one aspect of his attitude to memory: “[M]y point is that bad and good are inextricably linked in

remembrance, and that you could not choose the enjoyment of recollecting only the good. To have all the best of it you must remember the worst also” (Forster 2: 61).⁴⁷

Dickens’ attempt at autobiography sometime during 1845-48 (Schlicke 150) shows him remembering the worst and finding it too difficult to continue even though Forster noted that the fragment was written without “blotting, as when writing fiction; but straight on, as when writing ordinary letter” (*David Copperfield* introduction ix). This indicates that although Dickens abandoned his autobiography, he initially found the inscribing of memory far simpler than the creation of fiction. That he was able to incorporate portions of the Warren’s Blacking account, often verbatim, into *David Copperfield* (largely in chapter 11), and to imaginatively recast his relationship with Maria Beadnell in the character of Dora, reveals the extent to which the softening of memory via the imaginative process of writing fiction is important for Dickens’ sense of self, just as the softening of memory via the memorialising process is conducive to an ideal relationship with the dead. As Burgis observes, the “convincing representation of a remembered past Dickens had learned from his autobiographical writings” while the “invented story made it possible for Dickens to draw on his own memories throughout the novel without writing autobiography” (*David Copperfield* introduction xi). Dickens’ inability to complete a conventional autobiography but his personal investment in and sense of connection with *David Copperfield*, his “favourite child,” reveal the extent to which Dickens’ memory lives in his fictions, sometimes exclusively.

⁴⁷ Forster’s observation that “[t]he old proverb does not tell you to forget that you may forgive, but to forgive that you may forget” (2: 61) makes the connection between memory and forgiveness that the experiences of death in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* also illuminate. Patten argues that “Dickens can and will not forget or forgive, because complexly the recollection and preservation of the wrong done to him are the secret sources of his being” (277).

Dickens' transmutation of his experiences at Warren's Blacking is the clearest example of the softening effect that creative inscription has on painful and difficult memories. Dickens expressed delight that what he knew so well, once treated by imagination, became "a very complicated interweaving of truth and fiction" which he considered that he had done "ingeniously" (qtd. in Schlicke 150). Thus, although Dickens could incorporate his memoirs into a fictional work, sometimes verbatim as Forster's *Life* revealed, without the imaginative element that the writing of fiction imparted these memories retained a bitterness that affected Dickens' sense of self and his relationship with others.⁴⁸ To Forster he wrote "I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am" (Forster 1: 32), a claim to self-knowledge that Forster later qualified in his *Life*.⁴⁹ It is also qualified by Dickens' admission, in writing, that "I have never, until I now impart it to this paper [. . .] raised the curtain I then dropped" (Forster 2: 33). Similarly, David Copperfield had lifted the curtain for a moment (for Dickens) "with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly" (175). However, David's narrative demonstrates how persistently the memory resists this covering up, despite his confident assertion on Dickens' behalf that "I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it" (175). When Forster separated "the fact from the fiction" in his *Life of Dickens* (1: 20) he did what Dickens could not and removed the imaginative element that had enabled Dickens "to take all the world into his confidence" (Forster 1: 19) in *David Copperfield*. The fragment that Forster published concludes with an intimation of

⁴⁸ Dickens wrote to Forster that, having been dismissed from the warehouse, "I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back" (Forster 1: 32). This implies, if the lesson of *The Haunted Man* is applied to Dickens that he never forgave his mother nor forgot her betrayal of him. The sense of betrayal remains, albeit effaced, as with David.

⁴⁹ Forster observed that Dickens "had derived great good from [those early trials], but not without alloy. [. . .] Of this he was himself aware, but not to the full extent" (1: 34).

doubt that autobiography could successfully convey a self's thoughts and memories:

"[B]y degrees I have come to write this. It does not seem a tithe of what I might have written, or of what I meant to write" (Forster 1: 33).⁵⁰

This expression of doubt as to autobiography's ability to adequately preserve his memory informs Dickens' attitude to other forms of commemorative inscription such as biography and posthumous memorials.⁵¹ As an impulse behind any memorialising attempt, the desire to remember well and to be remembered well requires for its fulfilment the ideal commemorative method. This ideal was not realised for Dickens, the intensely private individual with an extremely public position, by the purely factual recollection and inscription of his life. Rather, it depends upon the combination of "fact and fiction, reality and imagination, substance and shadow" (Sanders 61) that characterises both the ideal epitaph and the creation of fiction, for "Dickens again and again insisted on fancy or imagination as an essential ingredient of the novelist's art" (Storey 11). If, as Carr argues, Dickens attempts "to control his biography from beyond the grave" (460) through his letters to Forster, then he attempts this too through his fiction which offers the imaginative substance of his memory as a necessary complement to the actual shadow cast by his tomb.⁵²

⁵⁰ Welsh asks "should we believe that the autobiographical fragment itself is the truth and nothing but the truth?" (162) and then continues: "Two such thoughtful and different students of Dickens as Albert Hutter and Robert Patten have argued recently that the fragment itself, if we are to appreciate its significance, ought to be regarded as fiction. Even the "editing" of the fragment that took place as it entered the novel suggests something of the instability of the original" (162).

⁵¹ Carr argues that Dickens regarded Forster as a surrogate autobiographer because he found autobiography did not meet his own expectations for the adequate re-presentation of experiences and memories: "Dickens's letters and other writing indicate an artistic and personal sense of the difficulty involved in translating even the least complex personality into print. [. . .] and he disliked the memorials he was asked to write for friends and colleagues" (449). Carr interprets Dickens' letters and other communications with Forster as Dickens' attempt to direct the future presentation of himself by developing himself in these letters as one of his characters.

⁵² Dickens' awareness of the power of any form of inscription to affect one's representation and memory is illustrated by his own destruction of personal letters, "[O]ften expressing a horror of the publication of

According to Dickens, he had shared his memories of manual labour and low associations with Forster alone. Although he authorised their wider publication in the *Life* that Forster was sanctioned to write, he attempted to preserve in *his* life the “*cordon sanitaire*” that the “autobiography of a fictional character [had] permitted him to establish between the “I” of David and the “I” of Dickens” (Patten 279). That Dickens could do this while concealing the autobiographical fragment on which this portion of the novel is based contributes to the ambiguities that *David Copperfield* reveals about memory and the representation of remembered events. The memory as inscribed by David remains utterly painful for him, a “factual” experience that has not been softened by time because of a resistance to the influence that forgiveness would provide. This resistance hints at the underlying doubt that this experience and the memory of it are incompatible with an untarnished gentility, thus testifying to the underlying resentment and anxiety that Dickens himself felt about his warehouse experience throughout his life as it related to his own respectability and his position as gentleman author.

David Copperfield is Dickens’ most unambiguous presentation of writing as a respectable occupation for a gentleman. Just as David reveals his concerns about respectability and class, ultimately presenting his private text as proof of his gentility and success, so too may *David Copperfield* be regarded as Dickens’ depiction of the creative process being harnessed by Victorian middle-class values to produce the very thing that Dickens himself would like to believe that he has become: a successful and respectable

private correspondence” (Schlicke 336). His family participated in his effort to control his posthumous memory by concealing or destroying documents. Schlicke observes that “Georgina Hogarth’s work in bringing letters into print was part of a family desire to promote and control” (337).

author.⁵³ To this end, the novel relates the story of David's attempt to become an author and a gentleman as he achieves the ideal balance between his strong imaginative and sensitive bent and the personal values and self-help virtues so vaunted by the Victorians. *David Copperfield* also reflects Dickens' awareness that an increasingly materialist and socially-mobile society made that most desirable Victorian attribute – respectability – an unstable quality and reveals anxieties about his own social status. Although Dickens enables David Copperfield to record his painful childhood experience of the warehouse, he draws the curtain over David's (and Dickens') experience of working as a professional author. David's reticence on this subject has been regarded as Dickens' contribution to the "contemporary discourse about the status of the man of letters, a figure who was undergoing a necessary reevaluation in the Victorian age" (Cronin 226).

Despite the claims implicit in *David Copperfield* for the value of works of fancy, the purpose and function of writing remain indeterminate. The first paragraph of chapter 42 may be the clearest statement of a work ethic but it begins by another denial of the primary purpose of David's and Dickens' work, which is publication: "[T]his manuscript is intended for no eyes but mine" (495). Cronin remarks of Dickens' portrayal of the writer that for "an autobiographical narrative written by a successful novelist, *David Copperfield* is remarkably devoid of commentary on writing as a profession: and, ironically, writing is frequently portrayed as a private activity, one that demands that the self be concealed" (232). In the light of Dickens' testimonial instructions, the remembrance of him that *David Copperfield* offers would suggest that Dickens wished

⁵³ In the Australian newspaper, Micawber praises David's "[e]agle course" (713; ch. 63) in terms that David and Dickens avoid themselves. He refers to "David Copperfield, Esquire, 'The Eminent Author'" (713; ch. 63) whose fame, like Dickens', is world wide. He also affirms the value of literary work, which is read "with delight, with entertainment, with instruction!" (713).

the written self rather than the writing self to be remembered. By contrast, *Great Expectations* offers Pip to his readers as the inscribed *and* inscribing self. The possibility of identifying such varied selves and permutations of memory in the books of Dickens' remembrance attests to his success in resisting the potentially circumscribed self and memory that a conventional epitaph would inscribe.

Dickens' apparent ambivalence regarding the fate of his autobiographical fragment was recorded by Forster: "Highly probable that it may never see the light. No wish. Left to J.F. or others" (qtd. in *David Copperfield* introduction x).⁵⁴ This apparent nonchalance as to the non-publication of his life story has its fictional counterpart in the parenthetical comment on the life in manuscript of David Copperfield, *Which He Never Meant to be Published on Any Account*. These intimations of artistic solipsism are undercut by the certainty of eventual publication, thus raising issues of the creative inscription of people, events and perception in the shaping of a self. A common observation of Dickens' depiction of the Carlylean figure, the hero as a man of letters, is the remarkable "equanimity about writing. So lightly does the narrator of his own life touch upon his career that as readers we are a little taken aback and have to remind ourselves that this is a novel about a novelist" (Welsh 109).

David preserves a silence as to his writing which, in conjunction with the long title's disclaimer of intending publication, invites speculation as to the purpose and effect of his works: for whom does a writer write and why. David explicitly avoids any discussion of his writing: "It is not my purpose, in this record, though in all essentials it is

⁵⁴ Carr observes that the "ambiguous instruction, 'no wish,' is somewhat deceptive since Dickens well knew that Forster had both the authority and the impetus to assure that the fragment would 'see the light.' His comment about the fragment's potential interest also is misleading, falling into the same category as his many disclaimers of the 'selling value' of his life history, since Dickens must have known how Forster and future readers would value any scrap of autobiography from the Inimitable" (459).

my written memory, to pursue the history of my own fictions. They express themselves, and I leave them to themselves” (562; ch. 48). He also avoids discussing his life as an inscriber with others, most significantly in encounters with Omer and Mr Chillip, the two characters that function as reminders of memory and mortality in *David Copperfield*.⁵⁵ He reveals most about the labours of writing when Betsey remarks “I never thought, when I used to read books, what work it was to write them” (702; ch. 62). When David makes light of this – “As to the writing, it has its own charms, aunt” – Betsey’s brief reply articulates what David in his modesty does not: “Ambition, love of approbation, sympathy, and much more, I suppose” (702). This observation is the text’s most explicit articulation of the purposes and functions of the creative impulse behind fiction; purposes and functions also present in the creative impulse that informs the memorialising process.⁵⁶

David’s personal-success story testifies to the strength of character required to overcome the early disadvantages of manual labour and interrupted education that Dickens experienced. However, David edits his life story to inscribe memories that will not threaten the self that has apparently achieved social success and domestic bliss. His personal inscription of self thus betrays the unbalanced remembering and forgetting that characterises David’s flawed relationship with memory and mourning. The appearance that *David Copperfield* gives “of a long day’s journey into domestic security and

⁵⁵ Omer compliments David’s writing, saying that in reading it he did not feel sleepy at all. David’s response is one of quiet and knowing amusement: “I laughingly expressed my satisfaction, but I must confess that I thought this association of ideas significant. [. . .] [then] I changed the subject” (599-600; ch. 51). Mr. Chillip evinces a similar desire to know about the labours associated with writing: “There must be great excitement here, sir [. . .]. You must find it a trying occupation” (679; ch. 59). David continues to “waive the question”: “I found it not difficult [. . .] to divert his attention from this topic to his own affairs” (681).

⁵⁶ For instance, the graveside reveries and castle-building in which David indulges upon his return to Blunderstone in chapter 22.

bourgeois prosperity” (Gilmour, “Memory” 30) similarly betrays the desire for domestic bliss that eludes Dickens and the anxieties that beset him in both his private and public capacities. Dickens acknowledged his sense of identification with David when “he grew increasingly restless and dissatisfied in the 1850s” (Schlicke 153). Forster noted that “evidences presented themselves in his letters of the old “unhappy loss or want of something” to which he had given a pervading prominence in *Copperfield*” (2: 196), indicating “that the autobiography in *David Copperfield* is much more private and intimate than a repetition of actual events” (Storey 20). These evidences, including the most explicit statement of identification “with poor David [. . .] as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made” (Forster 2: 197), constitute “a telling gloss on the apparent facility with which difficulties are resolved in *David Copperfield*, for if we read the novel aright what we will take from it is not the comfort that all comes right for David in the end, but a sense of the bleakness of its vision, in terms both of the environment in which its hero moves, and of the possibilities open to him” (Shelson 31-32).

David Copperfield thus facilitates the “writing out” of Dickens’ memories of the experiences of his early years, an imaginative inscription of personal memories which require the form of a tender fiction to be even partially admitted and accepted. Patten offers a significant comment on the implications of Dickens inscribing the life of *David Copperfield*:

Life and language may be coterminous and congruent; indeed life in some senses may not exist without the language of its experiencing. Thus David’s life is the product of his fiction as Charles’ is of his, in ways that

are almost too complex and redundant to discriminate. The writer learns to make his reality through language, and learns that language makes, constitutes, possibly is reality. He becomes adequate through fictions of his adequacy. (286)

Written a decade after *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* presents the reader and memorialiser of Dickens with another fictional autobiography by which to consider the relationship between the imaginative inscription of memories in fiction and in death.

Dickens and Pip

Forster's discussion of *Great Expectations* echoes Dickens' claim to have avoided "unconscious repetitions" in his return to the autobiographical form. He praises "the unlikeness in the likeness" of the two heroes: "[T]here is enough at once of resemblance and of difference in the position and surroundings of each to account for the divergences of character that arise" (Forster 2: 285). But more than the difference in social position and childhood environment, the intervening years of Dickens' life account for the altered perspective that he brings to his re-inscription of a first-person memorial narrative.⁵⁷ The memories that had shaped the inscription of the novelist hero and described the realisation of the Victorian self-help dream at the mid-point of Dickens' career assume more of the epitaphic purpose to instruct and warn in his penultimate completed novel. Despite *Great Expectations* being informed by anxieties and disappointments similar to those identifiable in *David Copperfield*, there is no question of Dickens expressing the sense of identification with Pip that he does with David. The anxieties as to self and

⁵⁷ Schlicke offers a useful summary of events preceding the composition of *Great Expectations* "which suggest personal restlessness and dissatisfaction, combined with a return to his earliest imaginings" (262).

status that Dickens may have concealed throughout his life are indicated by his self-comparison with the literary gentleman, David, rather than Pip, the blacksmith's apprentice. This represents an attempt on Dickens' part to direct that he be remembered a certain way, like the construction of a self in his letters to Forster.

To apply the terms used of the Victorian aspects of death to the inscription of memory in these two novels, *David Copperfield* represents the inscription of the more material/factual aspects of Dickens' life whereas *Great Expectations* inscribes a softened memory, the result of a growing sense of mortality and the mourning of things both lost and never gained. As Schlicke notes, "[W]here *David Copperfield* touches more closely on actual events of Dickens's life, *Great Expectations* [. . .] is the more intimate spiritual autobiography" (262). This intimacy and spirituality finds its origin in the sharp lesson Pip learns about the importance of memory and the acknowledgment of one's origins. The inscription of Pip's life is offered by its writer as an explicit warning to his readers to honour all one's ties to the past, to remember correctly, in order to mourn successfully, in order to live comfortably and be remembered well.

Summarising the accepted view of the connection between Dickens' two memoir novels, Welsh states that "there can be no doubt that Dickens himself exploited, criticized, and etched deeper the lines of his autobiographical novel when he came to write *Great Expectations*" (175). He continues: "Though Pip is not a novelist like David, today's readers may feel that he is even closer to a 'portrait of the author.' The reason why *Great Expectations* seems more genuine to us is that it is more self-critical, and this is our sense of what autobiography ought to be" (175-76). This is partly because *Great Expectations* treats more explicitly than *David Copperfield* the instability of social status,

the formation of identity, the threat to the stability of this identity caused by the tension between private and public, and the desire for secure respectability that are implicit in the earlier novel. Given the circumstances surrounding the composition of *Great Expectations*, such as the end of his marriage and the deaths of family members and friends, Dickens was compelled, consciously or not, to re-examine the two material aspects of memorialising that his fiction particularly shared with death: memory and mourning.

Great Expectations is the product of an older Dickens who has sustained more losses and accumulated more memories than the young author whose unwritten anxieties are betrayed by the apparently confident inscription of his fame, fortune and domestic happiness. As Gilmour observes of Dickens' situation at the inception of *Great Expectations* in the autumn of 1860, "[H]is life no longer conformed to the conventional pattern of men of his age and class, nor to the public image his readers had come to have of him" (*Idea of the Gentleman* 109-10).⁵⁸ In a letter to Forster in June 1862, Dickens refers to the troubled previous five years, drawing on his childhood experience in an attempt to understand his present: "The never-to-be-forgotten misery of that old time bred a certain shrinking sensitiveness in a certain ill-clad, ill-fed child, that I have found come back in the never-to-be-forgotten misery of this later time" (Forster 1: 35). Forster, in speaking of the "narrative of [Dickens'] life" (1: 34) refers to the lasting influence on Dickens of his childhood experiences, noting that Dickens was scarcely conscious of how his sense of humiliation had affected him in later life. Forster describes Dickens as having

⁵⁸ "None of Dickens's writings can be dissociated from his real-life experience" states Anny Sadrin in her introduction to *Great Expectations*, this novel least of all: "[T]he general atmosphere of the book, the ironic overtones, the pervading sense of guilt, the twin themes of faithfulness and disloyalty, the vain quest for money and gentility, the misery of unrequited love were all of intensely emotional topicality" (*Great Expectations*. Ed. Anny Sadrin. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988 (13).

“a natural dread of the hardships that might still be in store for him, sharpened by what he had gone through; and this, though in its effect for the present imperfectly understood, became by degrees a passionate resolve, even while he was yielding to circumstances, *not to be* what circumstances were conspiring to make him” (Forster 1: 34). This struggle to control one’s destiny, in death if not in life, may be applied to Pip as he participates in the “universal struggle” “to get a living” that his brothers relinquished so early in life as they lay on their backs “with their hands in their trouser-pockets” (35; ch. 1). However, Pip’s struggle is interrupted by the expectations that divert him from the self-help path of self-sufficiency through work to the gentlemanly path which figuratively enables him to retreat from life and be idle with his hands in his pockets too.

Great Expectations is not the attempt that is identifiable in *David Copperfield* to write something that does not exist into being, whether a self, memory, or an ideal present. It is the inscription of Dickens’ realisation that lest the lessons of *his* life be perverted, he must adhere to his own precept that “there can be no self without memory; that is, the total, differential memory built up out of two kinds of experience, good and bad” (Westburg 59). Pip is Dickens’ public offering of his personal realisation that identity becomes doubtful when memory is banished. Only at the very end of the book of his remembrance, when all memories have been acknowledged and incorporated, does Dickens allow Pip to authoritatively offer to his readers the lesson of his life: “I have forgotten nothing in my life that ever had a foremost place there, and little that ever had any place there” (490; ch. 59). *Great Expectations* is the inscribed evidence that Dickens offers in support of this statement. For instance, the opening reflections of Chapter 14 “appear to have an autobiographical element similar to the embarrassment Dickens felt

when his father was imprisoned for debt” (Paroissien 134). Pip’s fear that Estella will look through the forge window when he is at his “grimmest and commonest” (136; ch. 14) is the imaginative transmutation of Dickens’ horror of being observed when labouring in the window of Warren’s Blacking. Paroissien also observes of Pip’s convict secret which “had so grown into me and become a part of myself, that I could not tear it away” (149; ch. 16) that “Dickens may have used a similar rationalization to keep secret the misery he endured in 1824 at the blacking factory” (148). Although this is a secret that Dickens preserves throughout his life, its authorised posthumous revelation notwithstanding, the warehouse receives a specific acknowledgment in this text dedicated to the total admission of memory (244; ch. 27). It is noteworthy, as a further illustration of the self that Dickens inscribed in his return to the first-person memoir form, that “although a single letter refers to the writing as ‘bondage’ [. . .] the months during which *Great Expectations* was in progress are singularly free of the cries of anguish which punctuated his composition of other novels” (Schlicke 260), an ease of composition that this novel shares with the writing of Dickens’ autobiographical fragment.

Unlike *David Copperfield* where fame, fortune and domestic bliss reward the hero, in *Great Expectations* Dickens offers the material aspects of death as proof of the hero’s success in life: a journey to the graveyard where one’s name is inscribed and where stands a physical monument to one’s memory. Pip eventually shares the same work ethic as David but his rewards are not of the worldly, material kind. This indicates the extent to which “[s]ocially, morally, imaginatively, the world of Pip’s experience is more complex, more compromised, more essentially ambiguous, than the one David inhabits” (Herst 121). The textual fact of two endings to Pip’s life does not lessen, and

may indeed strengthen, the sense of a narrative, a life, coming to rest in Pip's return to the churchyard. Pip's instruction in the ways and means of memory and mourning enables him to offer his inscribed life for the instruction of others. In opening the book of his remembrance for public contemplation, an impulse towards communication and understanding that was unfulfilled in life, the author thus hopes "that others walking in the sunshine should be softened" (298; ch. 35) as they think of him.

Great Expectations thus demonstrates the constant impulse in Dickens' works to write out his memories with the softening influence of imagination. The material aspects of Dickens' life which he inscribed more explicitly in *David Copperfield* are more diffuse in the later novel, as if the process of inscribing himself throughout his writing life has enabled Dickens to admit, accept, and mourn all his memories, thus achieving through imaginative inscription the integrated self he desired. *Great Expectations* registers a new understanding of the connection between memory, imagination, mourning and self. This personal understanding is the key to a greater understanding of the universality of individual experience, enabling the successful memorialiser to inscribe memory for public interpretation. Instead of writing for himself as David ostensibly does, Pip's "memories are not self-curatives; he remembers for the instruction of others" (Westburg 176).

Dickens and Epitaphs

The instructions and wishes expressed in Dickens' will demonstrate an awareness of the ideal epitaph's form and purpose and a belief that the standard epitaph would insufficiently facilitate the preservation and commemoration of his memory. His words

represent an explicit attempt to overcome the limitations imposed by epitaphic conventions by extending the epitaphic form and purpose to encompass all his fictions: “I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works” (Forster 2: 422). This thesis has examined *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* as particularly significant representatives of the memorialising function that Dickens claims for all his literary inscriptions.

The instructive function of epitaphs was an essential component of their commemorative purpose by which the individual example (of life and death) achieved more universal significance. In his first *Essay on Epitaphs* Wordsworth wrote that an epitaph “is a record to preserve the memory of the dead, as a tribute due to his individual worth, for a satisfaction to the sorrowing hearts of the survivors, and for the common benefit of the living” (125). He identified the cause of epitaphic inadequacy and the “want of discrimination” (128) deplored by nineteenth-century funeral reformers as being the unusual stress involved in commemoration: “[T]o analyse the characters of others, especially of those whom we love, is not a common or natural employment of men at any time” (128), even more so when the subject is dead. Dickens’ instructions for the commemoration of his memory reflect this awareness of inadequate memorialising, but the connection between the creation of fiction and of epitaphs means that Dickens is uniquely possessed of the skills required for epitaphic inscription. His “common and natural employment,” the creation of works of fiction, may be described as the constant analysis of characters that he loved.

Dickens’ desire to be remembered by his works of fancy represents a further triumph over the conventional limitations of the epitaph. The nineteenth-century reform

movement of funerals and commemorative monuments stressed the undesirability of long epitaphs which primarily preserved the memory of the dead rather than “Christian humility and morality” (Vita 30). The instructions of Dickens’ will represent his offering of an epitaph that fulfils both these functions. Vita notes that, above all, nineteenth-century epitaph reformers “pleaded for simplicity – in monument design and inscriptions. If an epitaph were to contain anything more than names and dates, it should be short enough for children to read, even memorize” (29). Dickens’ physical monument and inscription conforms to this ideal in every respect. The other substantial though “shadowy” part of his epitaph, the books of his remembrance, meet and even exceed his society’s Christian and moral expectations.

Dickens’ instruction to look to his books for the preservation of his memory constitutes another attempt to resist the traditional limitations of the epitaphic form. The nineteenth-century epitaphic ideal was one which ostensibly excluded “the past’s imaginative eccentricities” (Vita 22). However, while the nineteenth-century epitaph anthologists “told the standard refrain – wit and sarcasm are ‘never so out of place’ as in epitaphs – the bulk of their volumes illustrated precisely what they ingenuously denounced” (Vita 23): their purpose was entertainment as much as edification. The interweaving of fact and fancy in Dickens’ extended epitaph represents his resolution of these epitaphic inconsistencies. The preservationist mission of epitaphs and epitaph anthologies is similar to the hope that Dickens expresses of his published volumes, which also share the affective purpose of epitaph collections. His belief in the value of literature is similar to the merits claimed for the epitaph anthologies which offered “moving reminders of mortality, lessons in faith and hope, comfort to the bereaved” (Vita 17-18).

With the influence of imagination, Dickens' books fulfil the epitaphic offering of "sentiments that are calculated to make a useful impression on the heart" (Vita 18).

Dickens' desire for what is effectively a multi-volume epitaph comprising all the books of his remembrance (his works of fiction) represents an imaginative re-visioning of the opportunity created by epitaph anthologies: "Printed epitaphs offered an additional and alternative form of commemoration" (Vita 19). They also offered greater certainty of enduring commemoration. Dickens' reliance on the preservation of his memory in his published works mirrors the epitaph anthologist's recognition "that the printed word survived text inscribed in stone or brass, that physical inscriptions were fragile, exposed, and susceptible to the ravages of time" (Vita 16). Dickens' instructions indicate that if his memory fails (that is, if his books cease to be read), then he is content to be remembered as one of many undistinguished individuals by the bare inscription on his tombstone.⁵⁹

This introduces Dickens' final epitaphic achievement: the preservation of his memory as a representative of general humanity, as indicated by the simple inscription on his tomb which conforms to the nineteenth-century commemorative ideal; and as a unique and noteworthy man of fiction, inscribed in imaginative variety throughout his books. Vita notes that "originality" with regard to epitaphs "implied a new composition; it did not denote uniqueness" (26). Dickens the Inimitable offers the originality of his compositions as his claim to individuality beyond the grave. Dickens thus conforms to the nineteenth-century epitaphic standard of unremarkable simplicity in one respect while simultaneously proving the acceptable exception. This was reserved for the "mighty benefactors of mankind" (Wordsworth 133) including those who, by their literary efforts, "[H]ave made themselves not only universally known, but have filled the heart of their

⁵⁹ An impulse towards humility somewhat undermined by the tombstone's position in Westminster Abbey.

country with everlasting gratitude” (Wordsworth 133). For such inimitable individuals the most suitable epitaph has already been created “by their works, in the memories of men” (Wordsworth 133).

Dickens’ will may be read as his final effort to indicate the ideal environment for and method of commemoration: appropriate functional aspects of death to be followed by appropriate memorialising. The purely factual inscription on Dickens’ tombstone and his testamentary claim that mere personal experience of him would be an inadequate memory effectively direct those who would appropriately remember and mourn him to turn to his creative works. Moreover, Dickens’ belief in the morally instructive power of fiction unites his “tender fictions” with the ideal epitaph which “professes always to inform, to instruct, to warn, to describe” (see Chapter 1 26). Like an epitaph, a work of fiction utilises description and instruction in the creative process of inscription with the aim of having a softening influence on its reader. Dickens’ personal experiences of memory and mourning find creative expression in his fiction where the inscription of them assists the memorialising process as well as marking the novelist’s progress through life and art.

Having integrated the roles of author and epitaphic artist, Dickens hopes to reduce the potential for being mis-remembered and mis-interpreted. Like Durdles in the Cloisterham churchyard, a stonemason “chiefly in the gravestone, tomb, and monument way” (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* 67), Dickens offers the memory of himself as “surrounded by his works, like a popular Author” (73). The few words inscribed on his tombstone attest to Dickens’ sense of the interconnectedness of his personal identity with his public self: a simple record of name and dates will suffice if his books of remembrance fail to keep his memory green. The best epitaph for him will be found in his

literature. Ultimately, a life of writing becomes the writing of a life, commemorating ineffably more than a few words inscribed on a tombstone.

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